

## Police sweep

THE INTERIOR Ministry announced yesterday the arrest of 245 suspected militants accused of reviving Al-Takfir wal-Hijra group, an organisation which considers society infidel and calls upon its members to retreat from it.

The ministry said in a statement that the suspected militants were planning to carry out a number of violent attacks against government targets. According to the statement, the group, which first emerged in the late '70s, was under the impression that the police were more concerned with the activities of other Islamist groups such as Al-Gama'a al-Islamiya and Jihad.

The statement added that a man named Mohamed El-Amin Abdel-Fattah was in charge of the group's plans and operated from a hideout in Jordan together with 57 other militants. They allegedly form the group's leadership in exile. The group, the ministry said, had cells in 17 of Egypt's 26 provinces and was planning to open a currency exchange outlet in Sharqia province to finance its activities.

## Syria cool

SYRIA yesterday played down Israeli reports of an impending summit meeting between President Hafez Al-Assad and Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. An official at the Syrian Information Ministry declined to deny or confirm the reports, but stressed that such a summit hinged on Israel ending its occupation of the Golan Heights.

Peres said in an interview published in the *Jerusalem Post* on Tuesday that he had received a reply to a message he had sent Assad through US intermediaries. Peres said the Syrian president had agreed to a summit meeting to revive the stalled peace talks between the two countries, but had not suggested a firm date for it.

## Algeria talks

ALGERIA will hold a national conference this summer to end four years of violence between government forces and Islamist militants. Mohamed Merzougui, a leader in the war of independence from France, said on Tuesday following a meeting with President Liamine Zerroual that he had been conferring with leading Algerian politicians, trade union officials and other public figures this week to discuss the crisis, but has excluded the Islamist extremists from the talks.

Zerroual will present the various political parties with a memorandum on the discussions' terms, said Merzougui, and the conference will be held after they have responded to it. (see p. 6)

## Turkey deal

TURKEY yesterday defended its recently signed military cooperation accord with Israel. The accord has been denounced by the Arab League, Arab and Islamic countries, including Egypt, Syria and Iran.

A Turkish Foreign Ministry spokesman said the accord was for training purposes and that weapons and electronic equipment that could monitor neighboring countries would not be used. Arab countries say the accord, which allows Israeli pilots to use Turkish air space, will harm Arab security and the Middle East peace process.

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## Force and passion

The Bolshoi is in Cairo. Last Sunday, and for two consecutive nights, they performed *Spartacus*. Tonight, and for four more nights, they will be performing *La Bayadera*. David Blake introduces the experience.

Be prepared, they embrace you. The Bolshoi erases all distance between performance and audience. They don't perform — they are. The Bolshoi survives forever. No need to worry about the story. It's the dancers who matter. They will take hold of you. Forget football and the 3 Tenors; ignore the Olympics, because Russian dancers always get the gold. What they do has no name but ballet. All the others are merely an approximation. They are beautiful, they sweat, they are demons without pretension, and they're above all human effort. They thrill, they shoot-up into the air and alight again in your arms. The memory lasts forever. (see p.13)

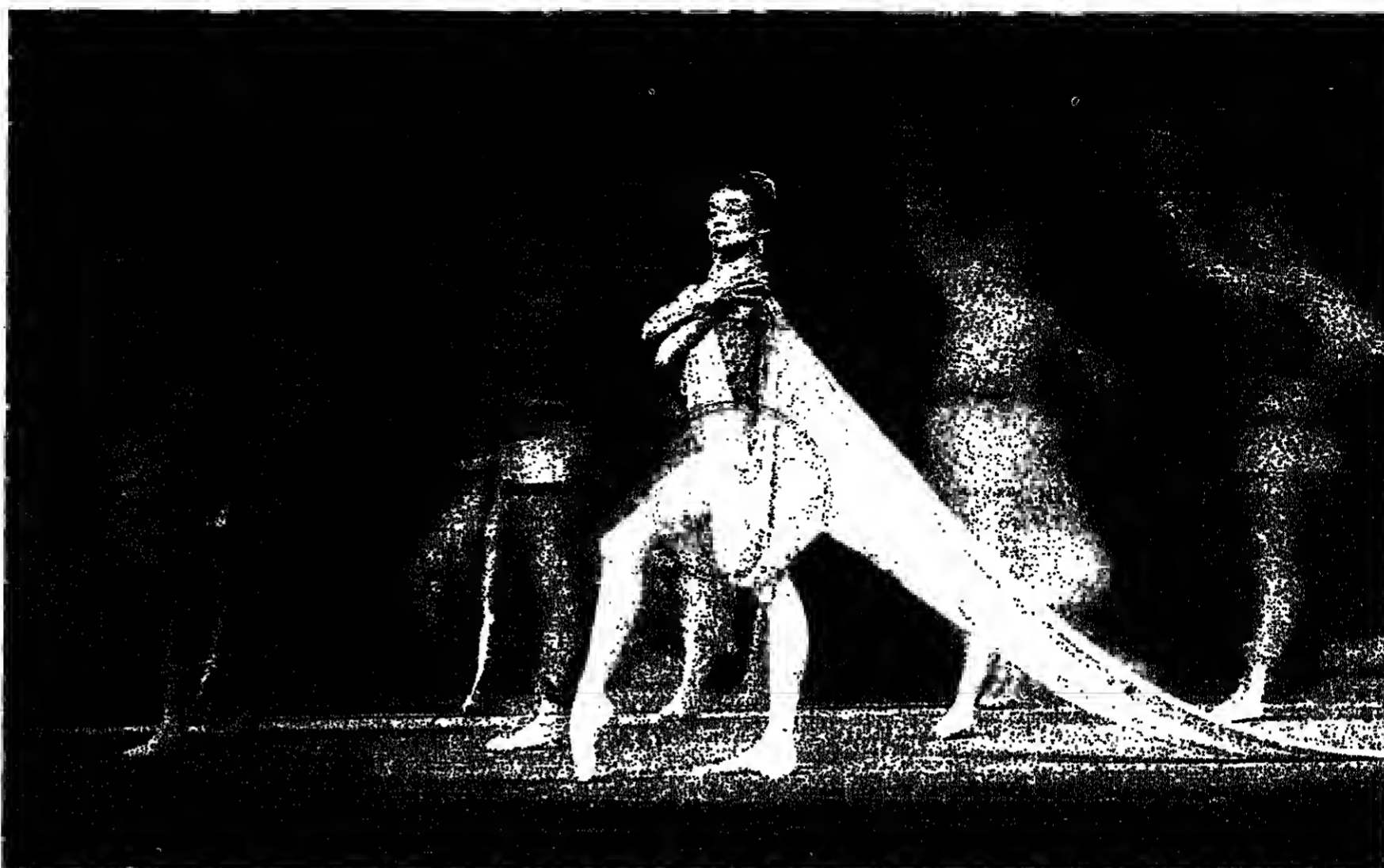


photo: Sherif Samir

# Nukes out of Africa

As Africa declares itself nuclear free, Egypt warns that the nuclear threat to the continent lies outside it, writes Gamal Nkrumah

Foreign ministers and representatives from 53 African nations meet in Cairo today to sign the African Nuclear Weapons Free Zone Treaty (ANWFZT), better known as the Pelindaba Treaty. President Hosni Mubarak is presiding over the ceremonies and delivering the keynote address. The president is to remind his listeners that the "Declaration on the Denuclearisation of Africa", issued by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in July 1964, was the forerunner of the Pelindaba Treaty. But Mubarak is also to stress that the Middle East, too, must be declared a nuclear free zone. Representatives of United Nations Secretary General Boutros Ghali and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Director Hans Blix, will attend the signing ceremony.

Ambassador Sayed Qassem El-Masri, assistant foreign minister for Cooperation and Multilateral Relations emphasised that the Arab League and the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) are cooperating closely on the denuclearisation of the Middle East. The two regions are geographically contiguous, as Mubarak Zahran, Egypt's ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, pointed out. Ambassador Ahmed Haggag, assistant to the OAU Secretary-General Salim Ahmed Salim, stressed that Israel's nuclear threat to Africa and the Middle East must not be underestimated, and the subject was high on the agenda for the talks between Esmat Abdel-Meguid,

the Arab League secretary-general and his OAU counterpart yesterday.

The South African Atomic Energy Corporation is located in Pelindaba, near the South African capital Pretoria. The word Pelindaba, roughly translated from the Zulu language, means "The discussion has been completed." But, has it?

Take optimism as always a good target. Procrastination is often a strategic *jack-pot*. "Egypt is apprehensive of the threat of radiation from reports that Israel's Dimona nuclear reactor was leaking radiation as a result of recent earthquakes in the region," Professor Mustafa El-Alawi of Cairo University's Department of Political Science explained. "The Treaty of Pelindaba will only be truly effective when the Middle East becomes a nuclear-free zone as well." Ambassador Mahmoud Karen, the Egyptian Foreign Ministry's denuclearisation chief, agreed. Deploying its diplomatic leverage to the full, Egypt is pressing Africa to acknowledge the potential nuclear threat that Israel poses. "Israel refuses to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and is reluctant to provide vital information to IAEA," Karen added.

Representatives from the five nuclear states — the United States, Russia, France, Britain and China — were all invited to be present at the signing of the treaty. "To encourage the nuclear powers to sign, we took care to in-

clude a clause leaving each country free to authorise the passage of ships carrying nuclear material through their national waters," Karen said.

No African power is nuclear. With most of the continent's countries having a per capita income of less than \$1 per day, cash-strapped African nations can hardly afford nuclear-powered industries. No African nation is in a position to export nuclear technology — with the probable exception of South Africa. Not a single African nation — again with the notable exception of South Africa — has the capacity to do so. The nuclear threat to Africa is essentially external.

No nuclear warheads are deployed against an African nation. But, Israeli scientists at the Israeli nuclear reactor at Dimona, in the Negev Desert, pioneered the research and development of weapon-grade plutonium, which is dangerously toxic — 10 times more so than enriched uranium. South Africa's Foreign Minister Alfred Nzo, who flew into Cairo from the Iranian capital Tehran, said that South Africa had severed all nuclear collaboration links with Israel. No nuclear deals had been made with Iran either, Nzo stressed. "The Pelindaba Treaty will establish the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCON) to supervise the implementation of the treaty, with its headquarters in South Africa," he added.

France, traditionally a major arms supplier to its ou-

merous former colonies in Africa, is represented at the signing of the Pelindaba Treaty by its Minister for International Cooperation Jacques Godfrain. Many of Africa's nuclear scientists, especially those from the Francophone countries, have studied in French universities and have collaborated closely with French nuclear scientists. In Cairo, Godfrain reiterated France's determination to continue its pivotal role as a training centre for African nuclear scientists and reaffirmed its willingness to conduct further research and development of scientific activities pertaining to the peaceful use of nuclear power under strict non-proliferation controls as stipulated in the Pelindaba Treaty.

China is to be represented by a high-powered delegation headed by China's Deputy Foreign Minister Li Zhao Fing — a gesture that highlights the special interest China shows in the denuclearisation of Africa. China has traditionally cooperated with numerous African countries in the peaceful use of nuclear power. One of its most successful nuclear collaboration ventures on the continent is in Algeria, where it has helped build two nuclear reactors, Salam and Nour, on the outskirts of the Algerian capital.

Both Britain and the United States are to be represented by their respective ambassadors to Egypt, Sir David Blatherwick and Edward Walker. (see p. 8)

## PNC in Gaza 22 April

A long-awaited meeting of the Palestine National Council has finally been scheduled — two weeks before a deadline for revoking sections of the PLO Charter

The Palestinian National Council (PNC), for many years dubbed the PLO's parliament in exile, will meet on 22 April in Gaza City for its first session in the Palestinian self-rule territories, the legislature's acting president, Salim Zannoun, said yesterday.

But given Israel's unprecedented security crackdown on the territories, leading PLO figures were sceptical whether the parliament would meet Israeli demands to cancel clauses in the PLO charter calling for Israel's destruction.

Under the interim peace agreements between Israel and the PLO, the PNC must meet by 7 May to abolish the anti-Israel clauses. "President [Yasser] Arafat called me yesterday [Tuesday] and asked me to announce that the Palestinian National Council will hold a session on 22 April in Gaza City," Zannoun said in a telephone interview with AFP news agency.

Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres, under pressure from Israeli opponents of the peace effort ahead of national elections next month, had warned he would freeze

the peace process unless the 7 May deadline was met.

The PNC is the only body empowered to alter the PLO Charter and can only do so by a two-thirds vote in a session called specially for this purpose.

Zannoun declined to confirm that changing the 1964 charter would be on the agenda of the meeting. "The PNC headquarters [in Amman] are preparing the agenda for the meeting and this will be distributed to members one week in advance," he said.

Israel has said it will allow all PNC members into the territories to amend the charter, although they include people who remain fiercely opposed to Arafat's limited self-rule agreements with Israel.

Zannoun said the PNC is made up of 560 members but that Israel still has to grant authorisation to 86 to enter the territories.

Many PNC members have said they oppose revoking the anti-Israel clauses in the charter as long as Israeli occupation of parts of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem continues and Palestinian

refugees are barred from returning home.

In another development, Arafat obtained a two-week extension to name his "autonomy" cabinet, at a meeting yesterday in Ramallah of the elected self-rule council.

"I need additional time for consultations with political factions before naming the cabinet," Arafat told the 88-member council, holding its fourth session since the historic Palestinian elections on 20 January.

Under the terms of the agreements setting up the Palestinian Authority, Arafat was to name his cabinet within five weeks of the 7 March inaugural session of the elected council. But the council voted to give Arafat an additional two weeks beyond the 11 April deadline, with only two deputies opposing the move.

Arafat also quashed a bid by some council members to form an oversight committee to monitor the fledgling Palestinian judicial system, which has come under attack from human rights groups critical of its practice of holding summary late-night trials. (see p.7)

## US-Jordan wargames

US jetfighters begin arriving in Jordan tomorrow to enforce a no-fly zone over southern Iraq and conduct joint exercises, while Syrian looks on with disapproval

Jordan will allow US warplanes to use its main airbase for flights over southern Iraq to enforce a Western-imposed "no-fly zone" there, Amman officials said yesterday. The 34 jets involved in the Airpower Expeditionary Force (AEF) will start flying into Jordan on Friday and will be based there for at least two months.

Jordan had previously refused to allow allied air forces to use its bases for sorties over Iraq.

According to diplomats, quoted by Reuters, the change reflected a major improvement in US-Jordanian relations, which had been damaged by Amman's support for Baghdad during the 1990-91 Gulf crisis. Jordan has taken on an enhanced role as a key US ally in the region since the signing of a Jordanian-Israeli peace treaty in 1994, the diplomats said. Jordan began to call for changes in Iraq

last August after it gave sanctuary to two senior Iraqi defectors.

In addition to the Iraq watch, the US force, involving 12 F-15s and 18 F-16s plus four KC-135 aerial refuelling planes, will help train Jordanian airforce pilots, who are due to receive a first batch of 16 F-16s in late 1997.

The US fighters will stay in Jordan at least until 15 June. They will use the main Martyr Muwafaq Salti Airforce Base in Azraq, 100 km northeast of Amman.

"The AEF planes will take off from the Azraq base daily, fly through Saudi airspace to southern Iraq and return at the end of their mission," a senior Jordanian official said. "No Jordanian pilot will take part in these sorties."

At the same time, the US and Jordan will hold joint annual war games between their air forces, codenamed "Eager Tiger".

The joint war games were condemned by the Syrian press which said the move was aimed at forcing Damascus to accept peace on Israel's terms.

The official daily *Tishreen* said the manoeuvres would escalate tension in the region and allow Israel to impose its hegemony over the Middle East.

"The manoeuvres and the US presence in Jordan constitute a dangerous precedent in the region's modern history," the newspaper said. "They serve only to escalate tension and to confirm that the so-called new world order does not aim at defusing the old spots of tension but to add new spots."

Syria filed an official protest with Turkey on Monday for its reported decision to open its air space to Israeli warplanes, declaring that this would have a negative impact on the peace process.

AIR FRANCE

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Foreign Minister Amr Moussa said on Tuesday that President Hosni Mubarak was not convinced by American-provided evidence that Libya is building a chemical weapons plant. Moussa also raised questions over reports of a secret defence pact between Israel and the United States, despite denials by US Defence Secretary William Perry during a visit to Cairo last week. Addressing a joint meeting of parliament's foreign and Arab affairs committees, Moussa warned that inter-Arab relations have become so divisive that "Arabs are in danger of losing their identity unless they move fast to defend it."

The meeting was the scene of unprecedented attacks by deputies against America's Middle East policy for allegedly favouring Israel. But Moussa declined to answer the MPs' questions on what Egypt might do if reports about the American-Israeli alliance or radioactive leakage from the Dimona reactor proved to be true. "Let's cross that bridge when we come to it," he said in English.

Moussa began his speech by declaring that the peace process between Israel and the Palestinians was passing through a "phase of tension or retreat". Although both sides were responsible for the conditions that negatively affected this process, he said, the fact remained that the Palestinians were the principal losers "because they are weaker and poorer".

Moussa said Egypt would never agree to sacrificing the Palestinian National Authority on the altar of Israeli elections, and any further delay in granting the Palestinians the right of self-determination could prove a threat to regional security. But he added that some success had been achieved in breaking Israel's rigid objections to the rise of a Palestinian state.

According to Moussa, Israel would be making a big mistake if it was planning to make a peace that favoured its own interests. He insisted that peace must enshrine "balanced rights" for all parties.

On the subject of reports of a US-Israel strategic alliance, Moussa disclosed that President Hosni Mubarak had raised the issue with Perry during his Cairo visit, securing firm denials from the US official. "However, we have to ask ourselves: is this alliance possible and, if it is possible, against whom

# A reaction for every action

Foreign Minister Amr Moussa warned that aggressive Israeli acts will not pass without strong reaction, while MPs slammed America's Middle East policy, at a parliamentary committee meeting this week. **Gamal Essam El-Din** attended



would it be directed? Would it be against an enemy that is anticipated today or tomorrow and what are the criteria for considering this 'enemy' an enemy?" The spirit of peace, Moussa added, could not be deeply rooted in a soul that sought military alliances.

"Anyhow, we are satisfied with the US denial but the whole matter will continue to be closely monitored by us," he continued, recalling that Egyptian diplomacy has a long record of struggling against strategic alliances in the region. It was unreasonable moves of this nature, he added, that discouraged Egyptians from normalising relations with Israel.

Commenting on Turkey's decision to open its airspace to Israel's warplanes, Moussa said he hoped that Turkey, which he described as a sister state, "will not take any steps that could spark turbulence in the regional security of the Middle East." On Monday, he had cautioned that "for every action, there will be a reaction of equal strength".

Moussa also expressed his concern over Israel's nuclear programme, which, he warned, could spark a nuclear race in the Middle East. He also pointed to conflicting reports about possible leakage from Israel's Dimona reactor. A number of specialised Egyptian agencies are following up this problem but would not be able to reach a conclusion in a matter of days, he said.

On Libya, Moussa said that the evidence provided by the United States about the construction of a chemical weapons plant there was not convincing. He said Perry had presented "certain maps purporting to show this" to President Mubarak, but he remained unconvinced, and had suggested setting up an Egyptian-European committee to investigate the American claim. Moussa vowed that Egypt would address this issue "in a quiet and peaceful context", brushing aside threats of American military action against Libya. But he could not refrain from dropping in the comment: "I wonder why Is-

rael is allowed to possess these weapons, but not the others?"

Turning to Sudan, Moussa maintained that just as the state had delivered Carlos "the jackal" to France, so it should extradite the three militants accused of taking part in an abortive attempt on President Mubarak's life last June in Addis Ababa. But he argued that the UN Security Council should ensure that the sanctions which it imposes on Sudan, for its failure to deliver the suspects, should not affect the lives of the Sudanese people.

Moussa also said that Egypt opposed any move for partitioning Iraq, urging the Baghdad government to comply with Security Council resolutions in order to allow sanctions to be lifted.

After Moussa concluded his address, he was showered with questions from the MPs; others spoke up to put their own positions on record.

Yassin Seragaddin, leader of the opposition Wafd Party's parliamentary group, said Egypt

should uphold its Arab identity and work towards a revival of Arab solidarity. "Otherwise, I'm afraid tourists will visit this region one day and say that once upon a time it was inhabited by a people called the Arabs." He claimed that Israel had never been sincere and honest in its search for peace, and demanded urgent Egyptian action to deal with the Israeli nuclear threat. A radioactive leak "could harm Israel, and I do hope so, but what about us?" Seragaddin said.

Hassan Radwan, an MP from Sohag, Upper Egypt, said Egypt should reconsider its relations with the United States "in order to ascertain whether this friend gives equal attention to our interests as it does to the other side's".

Kamel Abul-Kheir, a businessman deputy from the Nile Delta province of Gharbiya, asked questions about the impact on the peace process of a possible Likud victory in the Israeli elections and also about preparations for a Middle East economic summit to be held in Cairo next November.

Ahmed Abu Ismail, a Wafdist from Gharbiya, expressed apprehensions about joint Israeli-Jordanian projects that could have negative effects on the Suez Canal. These projects, he said, should be countered by a free trade zone around the canal and also by greater economic cooperation between Egypt and its Arab neighbours.

Hama Gabra, an appointed MP, harshly criticised the "rush" of some Arab countries to establish trade relations with Israel.

Suleiman El-Zamlout, an MP from Sinai, called for an emergency Arab summit conference.

Moussa responded that greater efforts were needed before an Arab summit could be held or Arab solidarity revived, citing "difficult problems" and "existing complications".

Although he declined to comment on the visit which Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres paid to Qatar and Oman, he described Peres as a "skilful man whose moves are based on careful study".

Finally, Moussa said that Egypt would make use of today's conference on banning nuclear weapons in Africa to conduct talks with a group of nuclear experts about the dangers of the Israeli nuclear programme and the necessity of extending the nuclear ban to the Middle East.

## Privatisation taken to court

Opposition parties are contesting the legality of the government's privatisation programme. **Mona El-Nahas** reviews the contest

Leaders of the leftist Nasserist and Tagammu parties and the Islamist-oriented Labour Party have filed a lawsuit with an administrative court seeking the cancellation of the government's privatisation programme on the grounds that it is unconstitutional.

The lawsuit is targeting a Cabinet decree issued on 14 February outlining plans for the sale of a large number of public sector companies. The Administrative Court, which will open hearings on 28 May, must either quash the lawsuit or refer it to the Supreme Constitutional Court.

Lawyers for the opposition parties argue that the Cabinet does not have the authority to sell a public sector company. Under Law 205 of 1991, which regulates public enterprises, this is the prerogative of the company's general assembly. The lawyers also argue that privatisation runs counter to Article 30 of the constitution, which describes the public sector as the leader of progress and development and stipulates that it

should have continuous support.

Of the three parties responsible for the suit, the Nasserist Party is the only one totally opposed to privatisation. Tagammu and Labour merely have reservations.

"The Cabinet's decree runs counter to the constitution, which calls upon the state to protect socialist achievements, led by the public sector," said Di-adein Dawoud, the Nasserist Party leader. He disputed government assertions that public sector companies made heavy financial losses. "On the contrary," he replied. "The public sector, in certain fields such as construction, electricity and banking, managed to make considerable profits."

Hilmi Murad, Labour's deputy chairman, explained that his party did not oppose privatisation in principle, but was critical of the way in which public sector companies were being sold. "We should know who is buying these companies, whether they are Egyptians or foreigners, and the share of each," Murad said. He added that the 1971

constitution had been overtaken by events and should be modified.

Tagammu, the third party involved, is demanding certain guarantees before public companies are put up for sale. "The companies should be sold to Egyptians only and the revenue should be used to finance projects that serve the public interest," said the party's secretary-general, Rifaf El-Said. "Moreover, certain companies, such as the aluminium complex and electric power companies, should not be touched at all."

Al-Ahram's columnist Salah Moutasser conceded that privatisation ran counter to Article 30 of the constitution. A supporter of privatisation, he advocated some modification of the constitution so that it could not be used to slow down progress towards a free market economy.

But Gamal Badawi, editor-in-chief of *Al-Wafd*, mouthpiece of the liberal Wafd Party, responded that this was not enough. "If we are talking about real reform, then a new constitution is needed," he wrote.

Mustafa Amin, in the newspaper *Al-Akhar*, agreed. "It does not make sense that we are still ruled by a constitution which makes socialism the basis of the regime and approves of the one-party system and totalitarian rule," he wrote.

But for People's Assembly Speaker Fathi Sorour, the sale of public sector companies does not run counter to the constitution because "it does not exclude the public sector's participation in leading development projects". As for the term "socialism" mentioned in the constitution, Sorour maintained that it did not mean that the state must interfere in running the national economy.

Merghani Khairi, a professor of constitutional law at Ain Shams University, is also opposed to amending the constitution, although he acknowledges that it has been overtaken by "the current political reality". In his view, "an amendment under the current circumstances, would not be in the people's interest".

Khairi believes that the law-

suit has a very strong legal basis. "If we interpret Article 30 of the constitution literally, then the privatisation decrees should be viewed as unconstitutional. And yet courts, before reaching a decision, not only consider legal texts but also take into account political, social and economic factors. Such factors in this case are stronger than the legal dimension. Consequently, the lawsuit may be quashed from the very beginning."

Asked whether the Supreme Constitutional Court has the jurisdiction to rule on the legality of Cabinet decrees, Khairi responded that Cabinet decrees are considered as "regulatory statutes". And the Constitutional Court "has the right to rule on the constitutionality of laws and regulatory statutes".

Khairi's stand on amending the constitution was opposed by another professor of constitutional law, Atef El-Banna of Cairo University. "If we are going to go ahead with the privatisation programme, the constitution should be replaced; otherwise, the government will

lose credibility," he argued. "The constitution should not be interpreted as allowing the sale of the public sector. Its text clearly stresses the importance of supporting the public sector and expanding its role in development."

The public sector, El-Banna continued, had been established in the 1960s "to offer services to the poor, regardless of profit. If the public sector is suffering losses, then the government should think of a solution, rather than simply selling off its companies."

If the government insisted on sticking to the current socialist-oriented constitution, then the sale of the public sector should be stopped.

In his view, the opposition parties would have no trouble winning their case. Asked whether they could be considered as having a direct interest, El-Banna replied: "Under the constitution, political parties are entitled to play a prominent role in politics and to contest the legality of any decrees." (see p. 4).

## Another EOHR defection

Nigad El-Borai has resigned his post as secretary-general of the Egyptian Organisation for Human Rights (EOHR) to establish a new organisation, the Group for Democracy Development. Brushing aside reports that his resignation had been triggered by a power struggle within the EOHR, El-Borai said that the new group's objective was to promote parliamentary elections as the "one and only peaceful means of change".

Mohamed Mounib Guindi, previously the organisation's treasurer, was elected last Thursday as its new secretary-general.

"Today marks the end of my tenure of the post of secretary-general, which began in January 1994," El-Borai, a lawyer, told the EOHR's board of trustees last Thursday. "I want to express my gratitude for all the valuable support and assistance you have given me throughout."

El-Borai, who was re-elected to the post last June, said that his move was the result of domestic political developments that made the establishment of the new group necessary. "At the time [last June] I had no intention of leaving the EOHR but things have changed," he told *Al-Ahram Weekly*.

However, according to some

in what seems to be a trend, the secretary-general of the EOHR has resigned his post to set up a new human rights group. **Dina Ezzat** reports

EOHR members, El-Borai's decision to quit came about because of serious problems with other leading members of the group. "His job was becoming increasingly difficult because every time he wanted to do something, he was faced by opposition," said a sympathetic member who asked that his name be withheld. His critics, however, said El-Borai "tended to exclude everybody from the decision-making process, which left him isolated".

El-Borai insisted that his resignation was not due to internal disputes or a power conflict within the EOHR, which has been plagued by similar defections in the past. "Leaving the position of secretary-general does not mean that I'm leaving the EOHR itself, since I remain a member of its board of trustees. I will always be committed to contributing as much as I can to the EOHR," he said.

Opinions were divided as to whether

the birth of the new group should be viewed as a welcome addition to civil rights organisations or condemned as another defection from the EOHR that would further weaken the group. "Over the past four years, there have been so many defections," commented a member who asked that his name be withheld. The most notable were walkouts by the former secretary-general, Bahiedin Hassan, who started his Cairo Centre for Human Rights Studies, and lawyer Hisham Mubarak, who established the Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid.

"But none of these people or those who left with them completely lost touch with the EOHR," said Guindi, the new secretary-general. "Since its establishment in 1985, the EOHR has remained a bulwark for the defence of human rights and basic liberties. Its solid foundations were not shaken by Hassan's and Mubarak's walkouts. Today, Nigad El-Borai is leaving but he is not going to deny us his expertise when we need it."

Throughout its 11 years of existence, the EOHR has been denied legal status by the government. The organisation initiated legal action in 1986 to end this situation; their case is still being considered by the courts of law.

## Bar council deposed

THE BAR Association was taken over by a three-member, court-appointed committee, led by the association's head Ahmed El-Khawaga, Mona El-Nahas reports. The move came a day after Cairo's Southern Court confirmed that a court order placing the syndicate under judicial sequestration should be implemented.

Following the proper legal procedures, a judicial representative handed over the syndicate to the three custodians, El-Khawaga, Mohamed Selim El-Awwa and Hassan El-Mahdi, in an official session on Tuesday, where they were presented with seals and important documents. The committee will be responsible for LE46 million worth of syndicate funds. El-Khawaga, a liberal, declared his personal opposition to the court order, but added that "court orders should be respected".

The January court order came after 14 lawyers sued the Muslim Brotherhood-dominated Bar Association council, the body which runs the association's affairs, alleging financial irregularities and misuse of funds. The court ruled against the council, banning it from running the syndicate and appointing three custodians to be responsible to the court for the council's affairs until new council elections are held in three months time.

While anti-Brotherhood lawyers considered the court's decision a great victory, Islamists within the association described the move as part of a government crackdown to end Islamist domination of professional syndicates. Brotherhood members of the syndicate launched several appeals against the ruling; the first was turned down, while others were postponed by another court until 20 May.

Mokhtar Noub, the association's treasurer, said the current tension between the state and Islamists was the main reason behind the sequestration order. He warned that "dealing with democratic platforms in this way will have a bad effect on Egypt's international reputation and the general political atmosphere".

And Seif El-Islam Hassan El-Banna, secretary-general of the Bar Association and so on of the Muslim Brotherhood's founder, urged that the role of the custodians should be limited to running the association's financial affairs. Administration, he said, should be left to the elected council.

But Ahmed Gomaa, one of the 14 lawyers who filed the case against the Bar Association council, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that the court order was the only way to halt the deteriorating situation at the Bar Association. "The situation made sequestration a necessity. Otherwise the rest of the syndicate's funds would have been frittered away."

sent the coterminers on stage toppling over each other.

"We felt a jolt, it was a terrible jolt," said Geoff Edwards, a passenger from California. "There was a bunch of people sitting on stage and all they went down like dominoes. That's how big a jolt it was."

The two mishaps followed Cunard's agreement to pay \$11.5 million in refunds and travel credits to passengers who travelled on the company's flagship, the Queen Elizabeth II, in December 1994. The liner undertook a voyage before a major refurbishment had been completed. Construction debris cluttered the passageways, wires hung loose, and passengers complained of blocked toilets, muddy and scalding water and no heat.

Meanwhile, Sharm El-Sheikh authorities have formed a committee to estimate the extent of the damage to the coral reefs caused by the ship. According to reports in the Arabic-language press, preliminary estimates of the amount to be demanded in damages are as much as \$23 million. Hennessey said the ship would not leave Sharm El-Sheikh until the investigation was completed.

The accident, he added, was probably caused by the captain ignoring the proper navigation lanes, despite the assistance and lighting provided at the entrance of Tiran Straits.

Some passengers indicated that they, too, would be expecting compensation, for the lost days of their cruise, an expense which would cost the beleaguered Cunard millions of dollars more.

The cruise ship Royal Viking Sun, with 527 passengers and 446 crew aboard, was stranded for nearly nine hours in the Red Sea last Friday, until two tugboats arrived to tow the luxury liner to the Egyptian coast. The ship had struck coral reefs near the entrance to the Tiran Straits.

For 120 of the passengers, it was the second time in five weeks that they had faced danger at sea aboard ships owned by the British Cunard Line Ltd.

John Farber was one of nearly 350 Americans who were on board the Royal Viking Sun, which started its round-the-world cruise from Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in January. The cruise was due to end back in Fort Lauderdale on 29 April.

Farber had been a passenger aboard the MV Sagaford

when it drifted for four days last month to the South China Sea after its power was knocked out by an engine-room fire. He and 119 other passengers were transferred from the Sagaford to the Royal Viking Sun off the coast of the Philippines as a goodwill gesture from Cunard to allow them to continue with their cruise. Asked which mishap was the worst, Farber replied: "When you're in danger at sea, they are all scary."

Passengers and crew said they felt fear but that there was no panic after they heard a loud bang and the liner shuddered for several seconds upon impact with the coral.

Passengers praised the crew, particularly the liner's captain, who kept them informed of developments every half hour. They said the crew had asked them to put on life jackets and

Sharm El-Sheikh made the news again last weekend as the world followed the Egyptian navy's efforts to save passengers aboard a stranded luxury liner. **Khaled Dawoud** writes from the Red Sea resort

stand near the emergency lifeboats for nearly three hours before allowing them to return to their cabins.

According to Ibrahim El-Hennawi, general director of Sharm El-Sheikh Harbour, the crash tore a two-metre gash in the liner, which began taking in water and listing before pumps went into action, restoring the balance of the 37,845-ton vessel. The mishap left the ship without electricity because water drifted into its main engine room.

After the ship was brought into Sharm El-Sheikh at around 1pm on Friday, it took nearly six hours until arrange-

ments were made for hotel accommodation and the passengers were allowed to disembark. They flew home the following day.

Each of the passengers, most of whom were elderly, had paid between \$40,000 and \$250,000 for the four-month trip. They were greeted on shore by a folkloric group performing Egyptian songs and dances, presumably an attempt to help them forget their ordeal.

Many aboard had been watching an after-dinner passenger-crew show when the Royal Viking Sun hit the reefs. The impact of the crash



## Journalists wait and see

Journalists decided to adopt a wait and see attitude pending a Shura Council debate of a new press law and modifications suggested by the Press Syndicate. **Shaden Shehab** reports

The General Assembly of the Press Syndicate decided to wait for the outcome of a Shura Council debate of a draft of a new press law intended to replace Law 93 of 1995, before deciding its next move. The Shura Council will also be considering modifications suggested by the syndicate. Unlike previous assemblies, which were packed and tumultuous, less than 100 journalists showed up for last Sunday's meeting. The majority of syndicate members, apparently anticipating that further action was unlikely, did not attend.

The Assembly, under the syndicate's chairman, Ibrahim Nafie, decided to re-convene on 19 May or as soon as the Shura Council concluded its debate. President Hosni Mubarak had sent the new law, drafted by a government-appointed committee of journalists and legal experts, to the Shura Council on the eve of the gathering. Nafie meanwhile sent the modifications recommended by a previous general assembly that met on 10 March. Both the draft and the suggested modifications went to the Council's Constitutional and Legislative Committee which will prepare a report on them which it will submit to a plenary Council session.

Although some journalists had welcomed the new draft as an improvement on Law 93, the 10 March Assembly considered it inadequate and suggested further improvements. The draft reversed a provision in Law 93 authorising prosecutors to take journalists into custody while they are under investigation for a publication offence. It also gave the judge, in most cases, the option of punishing an offending journalist by either imprisonment or the payment of a fine. Under Law 93, many publication offences were punishable by both. The new draft also sanctions journalists' right of access to information.

But in the 10 March Assembly, journalists demanded an explicit provision abolishing Law 93 and the halting of all investigations and court hearings that are currently being conducted on its basis. They also demanded immunity against arrest on the grounds of their work and that all provisions requiring imprisonment for a publication offence be abolished.

In a statement issued after Sunday's meeting, the Syndicate's Council vowed to continue its action to gain approval of the new draft as well as the recommended modifications, describing this as "the minimum of the journalists' demands". Unless these demands were met, another meeting would be held to give expression to the journalists' views, the statement said. A committee has also been formed to draft a code of ethics that will be discussed at the next General Assembly.

Sunday's Assembly opened with a speech by Nafie, who announced that the syndicate's council planned to hold meetings with a number of officials and public figures to gain their support for the journalists' demands. He said that "the coming period will determine whether the efforts exerted during the last 10 months have been successful".

Leftist Salah Elissa said that journalists should maintain "all means of pressure to ensure the government will not be able to tamper with the status of the press." Elissa said he was not optimistic about the situation, and suggested that journalists go on strike when the draft was sent from the Shura Council to the People's Assembly.

Nafie responded that "this is not an issue of being optimistic or pessimistic. What we should do is continue exerting great efforts to achieve our demands and express our viewpoint in direct communication with members of parliament and the Shura Council."

Galat Aref, a writer in the newspaper *Al-Akhar*, criticised the new draft, describing it as worse than Law 93 because it created new offences and provided new penalties. "It takes us back to the 17th century," he said.

Adel Hussein, an Islamist writer, asked Nafie whether he believed that the journalists' position had become easier after the new draft and the modifications were sent to the Shura Council.

"The same difficult position still exists," Nafie responded. "I have to put it on record so that nobody will be able to say that the chairman cheated us."

Edited by **Wadie Kirolos**

# Open arms

On his first visit to Egypt as President of the French Republic, Jacques Chirac kept a very busy schedule; talking politics, economy, infrastructure, culture and archaeology. At a hectic pace, Nevine Khalil followed the French president on his three-day visit



Portrait: George Bahgwy



## "An enchanting city"

President Chirac arrived at Cairo airport Saturday, where he was met by his friend of 20 years President Mubarak. The guest president was escorted to Qubba Palace, where he reviewed the Guard of Honour before visiting the tomb of the late President Anwar El-Sadat and placing a wreath at the Unknown Soldier Memorial. (photo: AFP)

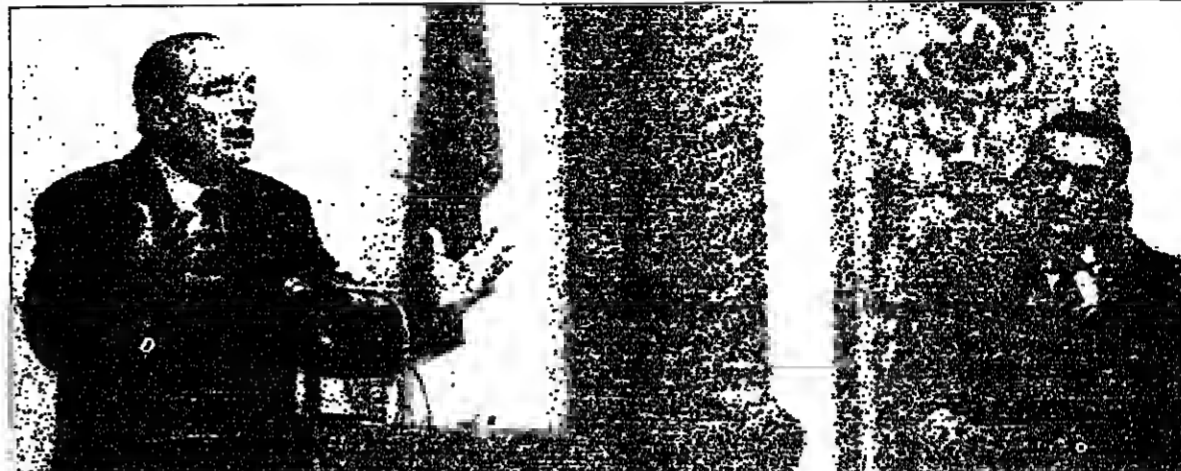


## "I am overjoyed to receive this medal"

Before a state dinner Saturday, President Mubarak presented the French president with Egypt's highest medal, the Necklace of the Nile. Mubarak described Chirac as "a dear friend who has always stood by us

in difficult times."

In response, Chirac said: "I have always held President Mubarak in the highest esteem, especially for his sound analysis and interpretation of issues. As you know, I love your country and am overjoyed to receive this medal."



## "A driving role"

After an hour-long discussion on bilateral relations, the peace process, Libya, a Mediterranean security pact, Egypt's bid to cancel \$4 billion in debts through the "Club of Paris" of donor nations and the third annual Middle East economic conference to be hosted by Egypt, the two leaders spoke to the press.

The French president said he was "optimistic" about the Arab-Israeli peace process, despite "political constraints" caused by upcoming Israeli general elections and US presidential elections. On the same note, President Mubarak warned that postponing peace talks until the

Israeli elections "will complicate the assumption of the talks, which will require a strong push."

Neither president would support US allegations that Libya was building an underground chemical weapons plant. "The information available is insufficient," said Mubarak. "[we want] information and photographs which prove the truth of what has been reported."

Chirac said that he was "very committed" to a Mediterranean security pact, adding that Egypt and France "should take a driving role" in pushing for this pact: "Egypt for the interests of the southern bloc, France for the European bloc." (photo: AFP)



photo: Mohamed El-Qil

## "200 years of Franco-Egyptian relations"

After the press conference, Chirac visited the French-funded archaeological project at Saqqara Pyramid in Giza. His guide (shown above) was Jean-Philippe Lauer, the 93-year-old patriarch of French Egyptologists. France is sponsoring the building of a museum near the pyramid, which will hold a model of the site as it was in ancient times.

Next, the French president visited the Egyptian museum in Tahrir, which was founded by his fellow countryman Gaston Maspero. Chirac took great interest in Franco-Egyptian cooperation in the field of archaeology, saying that two exhibitions of Egyptian artefacts are scheduled in Paris to celebrate the 1998 bicentennial anniversary of Franco-Egyptian relations.



## Practical seats for the underground

Visiting Al-Khalafawi underground station on the second line of the Cairo metro Sunday, Chirac was accompanied by Egypt's Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri (above). France helped finance and construct the second line after the success of the first connecting Helwan and El-Marg, which was completed nearly a decade ago. The president was impressed with the mosaic murals decorating the station walls, and the seats on the platform. "Unlike the benches in France, which people sleep on," Chirac joked. After his tour underground, Chirac resurfaced in Shubra to cheers from Egyptians eagerly watching from their balconies (right). (photos: Reuters)



## 1996, a decisive year

President Chirac, during his historic address at Cairo University Monday, said that 1996 should be a decisive year for the Middle East peace process. He told over 2,000 students and guests that Europe is determined to play a greater role in the process. "Europe cannot only be a financier," Chirac said.

In his 30-minute talk entitled "France and the Arab and Mediterranean Worlds", Chirac urged closer ties between Europe and other Mediterranean nations, as well as new cooperation with the Arab world.

Chirac added that it was time for Iraq to rejoin the world community by adhering to UN resolutions in return for the lifting of international sanctions, which must be guaranteed. He also called for an "international institution for water" to change the issue of water from a "source of conflict [to] a basis for cooperation." (photo: Reuters)



## "France is proud"

Like the Cairo metro, another giant joint project between France and Egypt is the Qasr Al-Aini hospital, which Presidents Mubarak and Chirac inaugurated on Monday. The hospital took 11 years to complete, at a cost of LE1 billion, and houses over 1,200 beds, 18 operating rooms, 10 X-ray rooms and four intensive care wards containing 65 beds.

"France is happy and proud to have contributed its knowhow and financial backing to accomplish this great and beautiful project," Chirac told reporters as he toured the building for almost an hour. France is reported to have put up 80 per cent of the funding for the new hospital. (photo: Reuters)



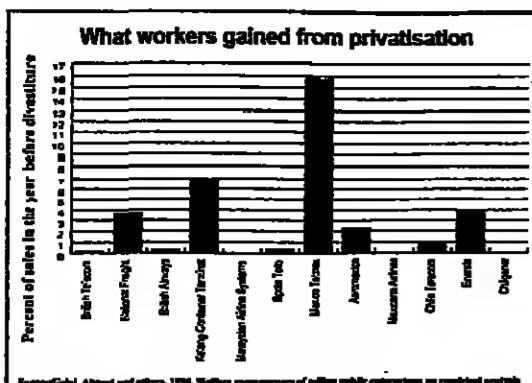
## Round of applause

Chirac's last stop was in the Mediterranean city of Alexandria, where he stayed for a few hours before his departure to Paris on Monday. There, he visited the site of one of the seven ancient wonders of the world, the Pharos Lighthouse. The submerged ruins off Qait Bey Fort are being excavated by a French-Egyptian team, headed by Jean-Yves Empereur, with funding from France.

To mark Chirac's visit, two pieces were raised from the waters, including a headless sphinx, and

the head of a Ptolemy, the colossal torso of which was raised last autumn. Chirac watched in awe as the huge granite head was lifted from its watery grave and placed gently at his feet, he reached out to touch it. The headless sphinx, dating back to a much earlier period, drew applause from the French president.

Chirac also visited the Roman Amphitheatre in Kom El-Dikka to view several pieces of statuary and masonry from the Pharos site, placed in desalination tanks there. (photo: Reuters)



## Costing privatisation

By Ahmed Galal

When Malaysia split its port into two ends and sold the Kelang Container Terminal in 1985, a labour leader, out of self-defence, criticised the deal, saying, "They sold the gold mine, and left the coal mine." A few years later, all the workers in the publicly-owned port wanted to cross the fence and join the private port. Workers at the Kelang Container Terminal exerted more effort, which led to improved productivity. Correspondingly, their wages went up. And although a few workers lost their jobs, they were compensated sufficiently.

Similarly favourable results for workers were evident in other cases. A World Bank study of 12 companies in Chile, Malaysia, Mexico and the UK found that workers, as a group, benefited from privatisation. They came out ahead largely because the privatised companies expanded a great deal and thereby absorbed excess labour. In one case, the Chilean Telephone Company (CTC), the company doubled its capacity within just four years of going private. This phenomenon was also seen in Mexico's Telmex and British Telecom, to cite but just a few examples.

Another reason why workers, as a whole, benefited from privatisation is that governments compensated laid off workers. In Chile, the compensation scheme was equal to one month's salary for each year of service. In addition, workers typically received 10 per cent of the shares of their companies, at a discount, along with soft loans. In the majority of cases, the price of these shares went up after privatisation.

In the case of Egypt, it is too early to judge the effect of privatisation on workers. The preliminary results, however, indicate that they have not lost as a group. So far, the privatisation programme has been focused on the sale of a small number of shares on the stock market, where workers received some of the shares under favourable terms. In only three cases did the programme sell enterprises in full: El-Nasr Boiler and Pressure Vessel Manufacturing Company, Egyptian Bottling Company (Pepsi-Cola) and El-Nasr Bottling Company (Coca-Cola). In the Pepsi and Coca-Cola cases, workers appear to be better off. In the case of the boiler company, the effect is not clear.

In terms of employment, Pepsi-Cola employed 3,896 workers prior to its sale in 1994. In 1995, the number was 6,133 (including 1,274 employees of the Mohandes National Company for Beverages, which Pepsi purchased in 1994). The average annual wage per worker increased from LE4,068 in 1993 to LE5,964 in 1995, an increase of 23 percent per annum, much higher than the inflation rate of about 10 percent.

In contrast, the boiler company employed 1,100 workers prior to its sale in 1994, of which 90 per cent were on long-term leave. In 1995, the number of workers totaled 1,008, an 18 per cent decrease from the year before. At an earlier stage, the company offered workers aged 56 and above a voluntary early retirement package of half a month's salary per year of service, but the offer was rejected. The company then offered employees a severance package based on their length of service. Those with more than five years were offered one and a half months salary per year of service, with a set minimum of LE7,800 and a maximum of LE16,000. In all, 30 employees, 28 females and two males, opted to accept this package. Seven of these employees are leaving the company on 1 June, 1996. Another 12 employees volunteered for an early retirement package. Thus, a total of 42 employees accepted the packages. Since the purchase of the company in 1994, 54 employees have reached retirement age, which is 60. The total number of employees in 1996 reached 1,031, of which 1,008 are permanent employees and 23 are under contract.

Against some loss in employment, the new owners consolidated all wage categories under one broader category, cancelling several categories of payments considered by workers to be acquired rights, irrespective of performance. In addition, the company offered employees a better pay for working hours, and increased the amount paid for meals by 50 per cent. Yet, in late 1995, workers went on a nine-day strike which cost the company 4,000 man-days of production. Whether or not the cause of the strike was the refusal of workers to adjust to a new mode of operation under private ownership, the fact remains that labor/management relations are not yet wrinkle-free.

Although the record on whether workers have benefited from privatisation is inconclusive, there is a general perception that workers are worried about their jobs. This worry is, in part, justified given that most public enterprises are over-staffed. According to the Social Fund for Development, labour redundancy in the public sector is estimated at 20 to 50 per cent. Moreover, workers are worried that their rights might be manipulated by the new buyers, since for example, some workers of previously privatised firms were denied the profit-sharing guaranteed under Law 203. Whether or not that worry is justified, it is necessary for the government to find ways to put such concerns to rest if it is to successfully carry out its commitment to sell more than 100 companies this year.

Aware of this problem, and conscious of the socio-political ramifications of labour unrest, the government has announced repeatedly that it will guarantee that no worker's welfare will be harmed as a result of the privatisation programme. Employees are not to be made redundant involuntarily and will be compensated, in one form or another, upon their voluntary early retirement or resignation.

Such announcements are necessary, but perhaps more could be done. Starting from the premise that privatisation is critical to mobilise investment and spur economic growth in Egypt, the government and other concerned parties may wish to take the following actions:

1- Publicising accounts of beneficial privatisation efforts in other countries widely to build a supportive constituency for reform. Ignorance is sometimes the worst enemy of reform.

2- Emphasising that the choice may be between sustaining current unsatisfactory employment levels with no privatisation, and more employment later with privatisation. Typically, privatisation leads to higher investment and growth, both of which create more jobs in the future.

3- Confronting the fact that workers, in the short run, may lose in privatisation, but consumers and taxpayers are likely to benefit. Where privatisation generates more investment, it can also create jobs for the unemployed.

In the final analysis, the issue is not whether privatisation will leave everyone better or worse off. Like other policy reforms, be they tax reform, trade liberalisation, or devaluation, some will benefit and others will lose. What counts is whether or not the reform is good for the whole country. If it is, then it is reform worth pursuing vigorously. The losers should be compensated according to clearly-stated rules, especially if they belong to the lower tiers of the income ladder.

The writer is acting executive director of the Egyptian Centre for Economic Studies.

As the government forges ahead with its stalled privatisation drive, public sector workers, unconvinced by government assurances, feel their wages, benefits and jobs under increasing threat. Mona El-Fiqi investigates both sides of the stand-off

# Privatisation's labour pains

Following Prime Minister Kamal El-Ganzouri's recent decision to continue full steam ahead with the slacking privatisation programme, tension between the government and public sector workers increased with employees fearing that their jobs would be at stake when the companies are sold.

El-Ganzouri's decision was intended to re-activate the Egyptian privatisation programme which has been moving slowly since its inception more than four years ago. The government's privatisation aim is expected to reach out and sell some 314 companies affiliated in 17 public sector holding companies. Throughout the process, the government has offered repeated assurances to public sector employees that their jobs will not be affected. Workers and labour representatives, however, are not convinced.

Mustafa Mongi, deputy head of the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (GFETU), said he believed the government will not be able to keep its promise for much longer. "It can only do so if it remains the owner of the companies," he said. "But once they are sold to private investors, no one can prevent the new management from reducing the workforce."

Some of the companies, said Mongi, are already attempting to reduce their labour force by encouraging, not forcing, those employees over 50 years of age to apply for early pension and to receive a sizable end-of-service bonus. In addition, he noted, other companies have for some time been refusing to appoint new workers and employing workers on temporary contracts as needed.

This trend, explained Mongi, coupled with the fact that eight per cent of the workers reach retirement age every year, will contribute to re-

ducing the number of public sector employees, who are currently estimated to number 1.1 million. By the end of 2004, he predicted, nearly 50 per cent of the workforce will have reached retirement age.

He suggested that "to protect the rights of workers, the contracts under which the public sector companies are sold should clearly spell out the relationship between the employees and the new owners."

The main purpose of establishing the public sector, said Mohamed Abdel-Aziz Shaaban, a leftist member of Parliament and a former trade union representative at one of the public sector spinning and weaving companies, was to provide citizens with stable jobs, thereby strengthening the backbone of the economy. Given this reasoning, he said, privatising the public sector would have a negative impact on the economy, especially by contributing to rising unemployment.

Although a large number of the state-owned enterprises are losing concerns and others are not properly managed, he admitted, they can be turned into successful entities because "these companies are really strong economic units."

He added that the government's previous claims that the sale of state-owned companies was aimed at attracting foreign investors are also baseless since the government could attract investors without selling off the public sector.

The sale of these companies, added Shaaban, will not result in the increase in production which the government is hoping for, because they each have a specific production capacity that cannot be exceeded, whether they are owned by the public or private sector. Instead, he said, the private sec-

tor might dismantle the privatised industries and sell the land on which they are located simply for the money that can be earned from the sale.

But as the government continues to try to reassure workers, labour representatives remain wary and warn they are prepared to fight for workers' rights. Niaz Abdel-Aziz, head of the General Syndicate of Workers in Engineering, Metallurgical and Electrical Industries, said, "The workers are not afraid of any changes in the system because no matter what, we will be able to defend our rights if they are threatened."

Abdel-Aziz explained that the syndicate has already outlined a number of demands that should be taken into consideration when any of the companies affiliated with the syndicate are put up for sale. These demands state that the buyer cannot fire any of the workers unless it is their wish to leave the company, in which case, the worker should receive an adequate bonus as a severance pay.

Moreover, he added, the syndicate has demanded that the wages received by the workers prior to the sale of the company not be decreased after the sale. The buyer should also not change the nature of the company's business.

The last of the demands, said Abdel-Aziz, is that 10 per cent of the company's shares are to be sold to the workers, who will pay for the shares in instalments over a period of 10 years through the employee shareholder's association.

These conditions, he noted, were already adhered to in the sale of El-Nasr Steam Boilers Manufacturing Company (NSBMC). "The syndicate," he asserted, "will insist on including these conditions in any contracts for the sale of companies affiliated with the syndicate."

"I challenge anyone to prove that an employee has been fired or forced to leave his job at the NSBMC," he stated.

To facilitate the privatisation process, said Abdel-Aziz, the government should first restructure those companies which are in a bind due to poor market conditions, such as the spinning and weaving companies that have suffered a loss resulting from the shortage of cotton on the market.

Workers of the Misr Helwan Company for Spinning and Weaving are anticipating with dread the sale of their company. Salah Abdel-Gawad, an MP and head of the Misr Helwan Company Syndicate, said that the workers know that there is no way of getting around the sale and, as a result, are concerned about their future with the company.

"Neither the workers nor the administration are to blame for the losses sustained by these companies because they were only adhering to rules set down by the government," said Abdel-Gawad. It was the government, he said, which decided to sell public sector-produced products at subsidised prices which, in turn, resulted in losses for the companies.

For example, he recalled, since 1983, the Spinning and Weaving Syndicate wrote a series of memos to the Egyptian General Federation of Trade Unions, the parliament and the prime minister about the decline of the spinning and weaving industry in Egypt, and the resulting problems. The only response to these memos was the establishment of a fact-finding committee.

Rather than selling off the companies, he said, the solution lies in using new technology and production lines which can address the chronic problems confronting state-owned industries.

## Sacked at Bisco Misr

GAMAL Mohamed Abdel-Maqoud, 27, had set his wedding date for sometime in April — that is until he lost his job with the Egyptian Company for Foodstuffs (Bisco Misr) in February. Now unemployed, he has been forced to delay the nuptials until he finds a new job — not an easy task under any circumstances. Abdel-Maqoud had been with Bisco Misr since 1990 when he was hired under a temporary contract.

There is, however, more to Abdel-Maqoud's hard-luck story. He is "just one of 80 Bisco Misr employees who were laid off as plans were finalised to sell off the company as part of the privatisation programme." Like the other employees who lost their jobs, he was working under a contract which was not renewed.

"When my contract expired, I went to renew it, as usual, but was told that the company was no longer renewing any contracts," he said.

Bisco Misr is one of the companies scheduled for full privatisation in the near future. While officials are, to say the least, pleased with the progress that has been made in privatising many public sector companies, employees at some of these companies are less-than-satisfied.

An accountant at Bisco Misr, who preferred to remain anonymous, said that the company's workers are opposed to privatisation because they believe it will lead to their dismissal. Asserting that privatisation is unconstitutional, he added that "the government has decided to sell off the public sector companies without first consulting the people, who, according to the constitution, are the owners of the public sector."

"We regret the fact that no matter what we do, our company will be sold since it is among the ones listed for total sale," he said.

Bisco Misr has nearly 4,600 employees working in five factories. The accountant added that, "Nearly 812 of these are working under temporary contracts. The company has decided that it will not renew any contracts at all."

The next step, the accountant predicted, will be for the management to pressure the appointed staff to leave the company, most probably by offering them early retirement. The reason behind these massive lay offs, he said, is to reduce the number of workers in order to find a suitable buyer.

Adel El-Shehawy, chairman of the Holding Company for Food Industries (HCFI), which owns Bisco Misr, and Anis Tolba, head of HCFI's Privatisation Department were contacted to address these claims, but refused to comment on the subject.

Employees at other companies voiced complaints similar to those of Bisco Misr's employees. Salah Ahmed, a worker in the Misr Helwan Company for Spinning and Weaving (MHSW), and a member of the General Trade Union for Spinning and Weaving, said, "The government should not implement the International Monetary Fund's advice to sell off the public sector if it is going to harm the Egyptian economy."

Bakr Bayoumi, deputy head of the MHSW syndicate, gave voice to the company employees' fears, saying that he expects over half of the 11,500 workers to be laid off. Bayoumi added that their company's syndicate hopes that the government will retain at least 60 per cent of the shares of the companies it will put up for sale. This, he said, will guarantee that the government will be the company's administrator, and will therefore not fire any employees.

## Ebeid pledges commitment to workers

Privatisation, Public Sector Minister Atef Ebeid pledged before the People's Assembly, will not negatively affect workers. Gamal Essam El-Din reports

The government's recent decision to put a large number of public sector companies up for sale sparked off a heated debate this week in the People's Assembly. At the top of the list of priorities for most MPs were concerns on how this decision would affect the job security of public sector workers.

Addressing the Assembly's Manpower Committee earlier this week, Atef Ebeid, the minister of the public sector, surprised MPs by emphasising the government's commitment in protecting workers in companies scheduled to be sold off under the privatisation programme. He said that the government will pay the salaries of those workers laid off until they reach retirement age. According to Ebeid, the social ramifications of privatisation on public sector employees is a top priority for the government in the coming period.

He emphasised that the government takes into account six principles while implementing the privatisation process. The first, said Ebeid, is that privatisation measures must not only negatively affect workers, but also generate new job opportunities over the coming period. In addition, he said, workers have the option of buying into the company at reasonable terms "because they are the ones who established these companies and therefore have priority in owning their companies' assets."

The third principle, Ebeid explained, is that the government will do its best to enable workers to own

the assets of their companies. "For example, if their savings are not enough to allow them to own these assets, they will be provided with loans on easy terms to help them purchase these assets in the long run," he said.

The fourth principle, he stated, is that in recognition of their role in building up these enterprises, workers should be allowed to purchase into the public sector at better prices than those offered other buyers.

The fifth principle, he elaborated, is that new owners should not be left alone to decide the fate of the workers. "Workers who opt to retire will have to consult with trade unions in order to best secure their rights," stated Ebeid.

The revenues of divested companies, he added, will primarily be used in rectifying the financial conditions of loss-making companies to ensure the continuity of these companies and the availability of jobs to these businesses. "I think that these six principles attest to the fact that the Egyptian economic reform experiment is being carried out within a social and humanitarian context," stressed Ebeid. The government, he emphasised, has decided to shoulder the responsibility of privatisation, even to the extent of paying the salaries of those workers laid off in newly-privatised companies, until they reach retirement age.

"We have enough revenue from both the companies that have been and will be sold to finance the social aspects of economic reform," said Ebeid, indicating that "we found that

if the number of laid-off workers reached 20,000, the cost to the government will be LE10 million per month, an amount which is not at all excessive when spent for the benefit of social stability."

While the public sector in Egypt is burdened with debts amounting to LE71 billion, he explained, its book value is estimated at LE88 billion, and the market value is three times the latter figure.

"This means that we will have, at our disposal, as much money as possible to not only ensure the success of the privatisation experiment in Egypt, but also to efficiently shoulder the responsibility for the social dimension of the initiative," he asserted.

According to Ebeid, the initial experiment of selling to workers the assets of divested companies has proven to be a great success. "We managed, through such easy terms as deducting a part of the profits to be used as a down-payment, a low interest rate and instalments over a 10-year period, to enable workers to completely own 12 companies," stated Ebeid.

"In four years," he said, "the profits from these companies (land reclamation and water supply companies) rose from 14.2 to 25.5 per cent on average," he said.

However, Ebeid expected that the government will face new problems in the coming months, but "we, as a government, and the ruling National Democratic Party, are instructed to develop an immediate solution in these problems."

## Draft law under fire

AMID workers' fears of the negative repercussions of privatisation, a new draft law, the Unified Labour Law, is expected to be approved by the People's Assembly during its current session.

The proposed law, which will replace the current labour law, defines the relationship between workers and employers, and is designed to meet the requirements of the privatisation programme. Most of the public sector workers, however, are not satisfied with it and had hoped that it would give more support to the workers. Protest against the new law has not been limited to vocal opposition, but has already found its way into the courts.

The Centre for Human Rights Legal Aid (CHRLA), an organisation that has worked diligently to support workers' rights, has filed law suits on behalf of 400 workers and has won nearly 70 per cent of them.

A study prepared by the CHRLA alleges that many of the articles of the proposed law are biased against workers' rights. The study highlighted certain reservations regarding article 118, which allows the employer to legally close down the establishment if it is going bankrupt. In this case, the employer needs only to inform the workers and their labour syndicate and pay any overdue salaries. This, according to the study, will be used as a pretext to fire workers.

Moreover, the law also gives the employer the right to redefine the workers' job descriptions, assign them to new tasks and consequently, the right to cut their wages. In this case, the worker has the right to resign without notice.

Defending the draft law, however, Mustafa Mongi, deputy head of the General Federation of Egyptian Trade Unions (GFETU), said that the draft has a number of articles which favour the workers. For example, he said, "It gives workers the right to express their demands to their employer. If they fail to solve their problems, a dispute settlement committee is formed to look into the problem."

The draft law also gives workers the right to strike, something they could not do before. However, it also gives the employer the right not to pay the workers for the days they did not work as a result of the strike.

In either case, said Mongi, the social security law will protect the workers if the new owner tries to declare the company bankrupt.

He also stated that skilled workers should not be afraid of losing their jobs, as their skills are in high demand and finding a new job would be easy.

However, Abdel-Aziz Shaaban, a leftist MP, is against the draft law which gives the new owners freedom to reduce the number of workers. He is especially opposed to article 203, which gives any loss-making company the right to decrease the number of workers, whether by firing them or transferring them to other companies.

Shaaban charged that this draft law gives the companies the chance to force their budgets in order to make it look like they are loss-making companies, and therefore have the right to fire some workers. He also said that the workers' right to resign at any time is nothing new.

Moreover, he stated, workers are facing a dilemma and will not even be able to depend on the social security system. They will receive a meagre pension and will not be able to support themselves, let alone their families, on this pension.

## Market report

### Good and bad

THE GENERAL Market Index (GMI) suffered yet another blow, falling to 200.07 points for the week ending 4 April. Trading activity, however, witnessed a turnaround, increasing to LE91.4 million in shares traded compared to LE72 million the week before.

The index for the manufacturing sector also declined, losing 4.71 points to close at 261.47. This decline was attributed to a loss in the share value of 19 of the sector's companies. The Paints and Chemical Industries Company's shares fell by LE8 per share to close at LE680, while those of the El-Nasr Textile and Cloth Company (KABO) lost LE3 to level off at LE147.

Other companies, however, had a good week on the market. Amid rumours that a group of investors was bidding for the majority stake of the Cement Company, its shares gained LE10.99 to close at LE365. Shares of the Watania for Glass and Crystal Company increased in value by 19.44 per cent to settle at LE10.75 per share. Although shares of the Suez Cement Company

gained only LE0.26, trading in its shares dominated the market, accounting for 17.97 per cent of the total trading. In all, LE21.7 million worth of its shares changed hands.

In the financial sector, the index closed 3.27 points lower than last week's level, and levelled off at 205.89 points.

Shares of the Alexandria Commercial and Marine Bank lost LE20 to close at LE49 while those of El-Shams Housing and Urbanisation Company lost 11.11 per cent of their value to close at LE4.4 per share. This was the highest loss in share value recorded for the week.

On the upswing, shares of the Commercial International Bank (CIB) gained LE2.5 to close at LE446, while those of the Heliopolis for Housing and Development Company fell by LE2 to stabilise at LE215.

The service sector's index gained a marginal 0.3 points, with the shares of the Misr Hotels Company (Hilton) gaining LE0.5 to close at LE54.75.

Edited by Ghada Ragab



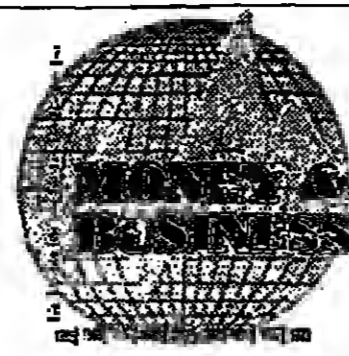
photo: Adel Ahmed

### Insuring Qasr El-Aini

PRESIDENT Hosni Mubarak and French President Chirac opened Qasr El-Aini Teaching Hospital. Placing their confidence in El-Chark Insurance Co, the French contractors assigned it the insurance coverage of Qasr El-Aini Hospital. The insurance policy is worth FF600mn.

The teaching hospital, for which France has contributed 80 per cent of the funding, is equipped with the latest medical equipment.

## MONEY & BUSINESS



### New chairman elected

IN ORDER to devote his efforts towards developing the Egyptian Industries Federation over which he presides, Mohamed Farid Khamis decided not to nominate himself for the chairmanship of the Investor's Society General Assembly of 10th of Ramadan City. Khamis' decision came after the assembly convened last Sunday. Khamis is also the chairman of the Industry Committee at the Shura Council. Redallah Helmi was elected as chairman of the society.

## NBE supporting young graduates' projects

IN AN attempt to mitigate the negative repercussions of the reform programme and the privatisation project, the National Bank of Egypt (NBE) has embarked upon introducing an integrated programme to finance small-scale produce, whether exclusively or in cooperation with the Social Development Fund, in addition to participating in establishing projects for employing graduates.

To this end, the bank has participated in establishing United Producers Company, which aims at providing milk producers in the Egyptian countryside with the necessary veterinary guidance, as well as creating centres for gathering and transporting milk to the company's factories in 10th of Ramadan City, where the milk is pasteurised and bottled in sterilised bottles

weighing 10kg each. The company then distributes the bottles to 40 distribution centres as a first step, covering Cairo. Each centre is equipped with 40 graduates provided with distribution means to deliver the milk directly to consumers, to be sold on credit basis, payable in the span of 3 years via the Social Development Fund. In addition, the company aims at man-

ufacturing and distributing juices, drinks and pastries.

The project's capital amounts to LE10mn, distributed over 100,000 shares with a nominal value of LE100 each, given that the project shall be implemented in 3 phases.

The company's headquarters are located in Cairo, whereas its projects are in 10th of

Ramadan City. The company may establish branches, offices or agencies domestically or abroad, provided that the approval of the General Investment Authority is obtained.

These concerned efforts further illustrate NBE's overall strategy to boost the private sector's endeavours to maximise productivity and create new job opportunities for young graduates.

### Al-Ahram offers e-mail services

WE CURRENTLY live in the information age, where telecommunications and technology are changing the way we look at our world and ourselves.

Al-Ahram — the largest and oldest press organisation in the Middle East — has established an Arabic e-mail network, using Al-Ahram's resources and the most modern means to offer communication services via the Internet in Arabic. The network operates within the framework of Al-Ahram Press Organisation, which offers the following services:

For ministries, organisations and banks, Al-Ahram provides the use of e-mail, a fast and private way to send messages, 24 hours a day, from the organisation's centre to its branches domestically and abroad.

Additional services offered to businessmen include specialised daily bulletins; late morning and evening news; economy (banking, money, business, investment, tourism); culture; daily and weekly political coverage and analysis; activities of Arabs residing abroad; etc.

The Information Centre extends all of its services to academics and researchers.

To organisations and the general public it offers information on politics, economics, sociology, arts, and culture.

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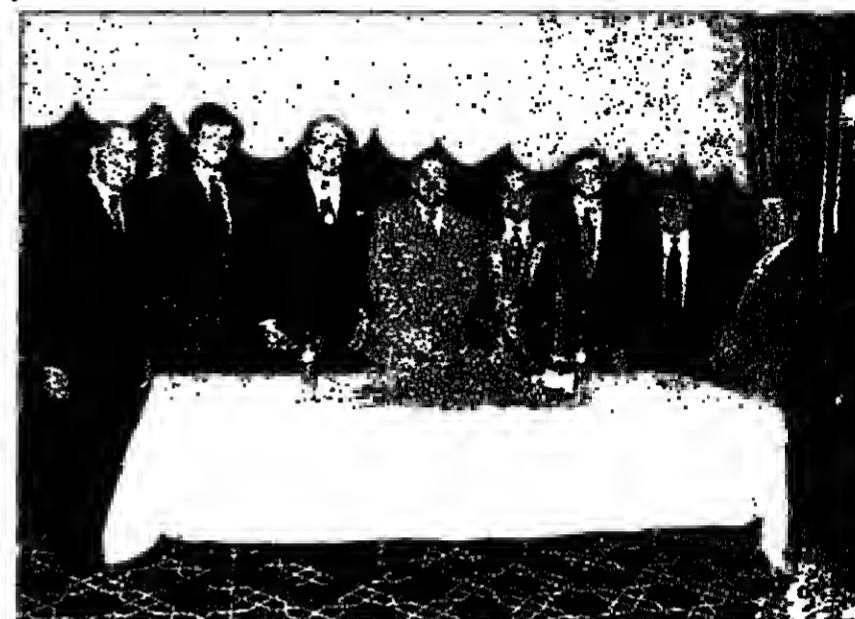


H.E. the Ambassador of India Kanwal Sibal with Press Attaché S.K. Reddy in the farewell reception given on the occasion of Ms. Reddy's departure from Cairo.

### Contract signed for citric acid plant

A CONTRACT for supplying information and technology was signed on 3 April between Citro-Misr and the Austrian company Vogelbusch. The factory, located at 10th of Ramadan City, will be able to produce 12,000 tons of citric acid and salts per year. Investment costs are expected to reach LE80mn. Production will cover the requirements of Egypt and the Arab world. Citric acid and salt are a key component in pharmaceuticals, foodstuffs, beverages and detergents, and are also used in water and oil treatment.

The contract was signed on the Austrian side by Mr. Josef Model, senior vice-president of Vogelbusch, and Mr. Stefan Kuzmits, vice-president of the company. Representing Egypt in the signing was Adel Fouad, chairman and managing director of Citro-Misr



Egyptian-Austrian cooperation continues to prosper

Co, and Ibrahim Ezzat, vice-chairman of the company.

The signing took place in the presence of Dr Martin Glatz, the Austrian commercial counselor, and the mem-

bers of the board of Citro-Misr Co, Abdallah El-Gizery, Mustafa Kamel Mourad and Abdel-Ati Taha. The project is considered one of the fruits of cooperation between Australia and Egypt.

### Turkish businessmen to seek business and investment opportunities in Egypt

IN A move designed to increase ties between the two countries, a delegation of Turkish businessmen operating in Europe will visit Egypt. The visit, scheduled for 19 to 24 April 1996, will take place under the framework of meetings with Egyptian authorities and business counterparts, with the intent of securing possible economic partners, and potential investment opportunities.

Nearly 55,000 Turkish businessmen operate in Western European countries. 40,000 of them operate in Germany alone, employing about 180,000 people.

Such numbers of Turkish businessmen led twenty-five of the

most prominent Turkish businessmen based in Europe to establish what is known as the Turkish Businessmen Association of Europe (TBIAE). Founded in 1992, TBIAE is composed of the most dynamic Turkish businessmen in Germany, as seen by their total yearly turnover which exceeded DM9bn in 1995, while the yearly turnover of all Turkish businessmen in Germany amounts to DM35bn. By virtue of the fact that all TBIAE members are registered as German companies, they benefit from the financial facilities and services made available by German financial institutions.

### French visitor at Ain Shams University



Reda El-Adl

MARGI Sudre, the francophone affairs official at the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, visited the French Department at the Faculty of Commerce, Ain Shams University recently.

Reda El-Adl, dean of the faculty, stated that Sudre met with Abdel-Wahab Abdel-Hafez, president of the university. During this visit, Sudre hailed the renovation of Al-Zaafaran Palace at the university.

### Mining and Refractories Holding Company The Egyptian Financial & Industrial Company EFIC

The EFIC is considered the leading Co. of the Phosphate Fertilizer Industry in Egypt, its production and consumption shows as follows:

Yearly total production 800000 ton of single super Phosphate SSP	
Local consumption (65%)	520000 ton of SSP
Export to international markets (Africa, Asia, Europe) (35%)	280000 ton of SSP

Most countries preferred to use SSP because it contains Sulphur and Calcium elements in addition to the Phosphor element which are very important for the improvement of the soil fertility specially the alkaline soil.

It is well known that the restrictive decisions for exporting Fertilizers a broad didn't include the Phosphate Fertilizer because the two producing Co. of Phosphate Fertilizer in Egypt cover all consumption requests made by Egyptian agriculturists of this particular fertilizer.

The outside demand of (P.F) produced by - EFIC - is increasing continuously and therefore the Co. has increased the units of granulating the fertilizer to cover all needs, it is expected that the value of the exports will reach L.E. 50 million in 1995/96, L.E. 65 million in 1996/97 in addition to the local distribution of this fertilizer.

The company has been able to cover the overdraft of the commercial banks and it has deposits of L.E. 55 million and amortized all the foreign funds.

Also the surplus has been increased in 1994/95 to reach L.E. 21.8 million versus L.E. 10.1 million 1993/94. The actual surplus in the first 6 months of 1995/96 reached L.E. 22 million

Items	Value in L.E. thousand			
	92/93	93/94	94/95	1/7 to 31/12/95
Production	91731	94681	135784	87703
Sales	85285	104236	139817	99957
Exports	3747	19802	36942	17643
Surplus before interest	13290	15688	13155	22478
Interest	8473	5601	2026	1064
Surplus after interest and before tax	4818	10088	21837	21414
Surplus after interest and tax	4817	10087	11129	14140

The previous accumulated interest during 1994 /95 has been deducted which had serious impact on the Business Results and positive impact will show on the future Business Results

\$500 million authorized capital



\$ 100 million issued and paid up capital

### Faisal Islamic Bank of Egypt

#### Financial Statement

Figures (L.E.)	Until Feb. 19, 1996	Until March 1, 1995	Growth rate
Volume of transactions	10000	8988	11.3%
Financial status	6469	6228	3.9%
Deposits	4988	4991	4.1%
Investment balance	5943	5530	3.9%
Revenues of the bank	505	450	12.2%
Net profits in 9 months	213	200	6.5%

The value of profits distributed for depositors during the past 9 months totalled L.E. 204.5 million in comparison with L.E. 174.8 million last year.

The number of companies which the bank established or participated in establishing reached 37 operating in various fields. Total capital of these companies amount to L.E. 1074 million in which the bank holds shares of L.E. 191 million. 5 of these operate in the area of agriculture 8 in the area of industry, 6 in medical care, 3 in domestic trade, 7 in banking and 2 in the field of housing



"Sudanese are already isolated, but this time, sanctions might hit out at the regime"

As demands for tougher sanctions become more vociferous, the Khartoum regime's bravado might just blow up in its face, **Sherine Bahaa** gauges the mood

## Sudan sanctions in the balance

"Threats and plots will never deter us from pursuing our policy," Sudanese President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir told a cheering crowd in Khartoum after his election victory last month. And so it seems that the seven-year-old Turabi-Bashir regime remains defiant amidst mounting international concern about its support of terrorism and growing hostility from neighbouring East African states.

The 60-day moratorium given by the Security Council for Sudan to turn over three men wanted in connection with the assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak elapsed at the end of last month without a significant response from the Sudanese regime, which claimed it was unable to find the suspects. Nevertheless, a few days ago, a US official told a closed-door Security Council meeting that one of the suspects had fled Sudan.

The Security Council is currently discussing proposals for sanctions against Sudan. It is yet to issue a resolution spelling out the exact measures. But calls for tougher sanctions are gathering momentum.

Last week's draft resolution, initiated by Egypt and a number of non-aligned nations, imposes only diplomatic sanctions. This draft was vehemently opposed by the United States, which added Sudan to its list of states that sponsor terrorism three years ago and last month withdrew its embassy staff from Khartoum.

US ambassador to the UN, Madeleine Albright, called for an arms embargo. So did Ethiopia, which also reacted angrily to last week's draft resolution and called on the UN Security Council to impose an arms embargo and a ban on flights by Sudan Airways, the national carrier, which has been accused of transporting one

suspect from Addis Ababa. The US backed the Ethiopian stance and in the words of Albright, would like to "make sure the UN resolution is as strong as it possibly can be."

But Egyptian Foreign Minister Amr Moussa told a parliamentary committee meeting this week that, while the international community was demanding sanctions, Egypt was anxious that they should not hurt the Sudanese people.

The Egyptian government also remains opposed to an air or arms embargo on the grounds that it could weaken the Sudanese army and bring about an escalation of the conflict in the south.

"Egypt will agree to any kind of sanctions except an embargo on arms. We have our own agenda. We cannot accept that [Sudan] becomes two parts," said Mubarak in an interview with CNN this week.

Ahmed Hamroush, head of the Egyptian Committee for Solidarity, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "The Egyptian stance regarding the air embargo is governed by geography. If such an embargo is imposed against Sudan it would have negative repercussions on both countries. To surround Egypt with sanctioned countries from the south, west and even the east is simply unacceptable." He pointed out that Egypt would be caught in the middle, between Libya, which has been subjected to an air embargo for the past three years; Sudan to the south and the Palestinian territories, whose residents are reeling from deteriorating economic conditions, in the east.

Hamroush believes that the Turabi-Bashir regime is actually sacrificing the Sudanese people for the sake of the three assailants, a view shared by Farouq Abu Issa, a leading member of the Sudanese opposition and head of the Arab Law-

yers Federation, who believes that the Sudanese regime has tied its fate irrevocably to that of an international movement of Islamist militancy.

"We said previously that Sudan will not hand over the wanted men and it will never do so. The Turabi-Bashir regime cannot surrender the culprits because it is actually part of the wider international militant movement, and Turabi does not want to risk losing the movement's backing," Abu Issa told the *Weekly*.

Following reports that the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) has made advances close to the Ethiopian border and that some Sudanese army units were refusing to fight in the south, fear of a disintegrated Sudan seems to be the main obstacle to an arms embargo against Sudan. But the Sudanese opposition sees things differently. Many believe that John Garang, leader of the SPLA, is not fighting for independence but for democracy.

Al-Tijani Al-Tayeb, a prominent Sudanese opposition figure, said that the SPLA is part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), a fact, he said, that was clearly emphasised in all its statements and decisions.

The NDA, which represents a popular base for Sudanese forces opposed to the current regime, embraces the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionists, the Communist Party and the SPLA. The alliance is calling on the government to abdicate in favour of a transitional national unity government, to organise a constitutional conference, make peace with the SPLA and hold multi-party elections.

According to Al-Tayeb "the SPLA does not favour a war. It is the regime that initiated this ongoing conflict under the name of jihad or holy war. It is dealing with southerners as second

class citizens because they are not Muslims."

Al-Tayeb believes that imposing an arms embargo on Sudan will soon become a necessity. The Turabi-Bashir regime has recently concluded a \$300 million arms deal in anticipation of a UN arms embargo. "Imagine what a difference this sum would have made to our country's deteriorating economy," he said. However, while accepting the inevitability of punishing Sudan, Al-Tayeb commented on "the differing opinions on the extent of the penalty."

"We appreciate Egypt's position," he continued. "Egypt is of the opinion that sanctions imposed on Sudan will add to the suffering of the Sudanese people. However, I believe that it is Turabi's party that is ruling our country at the moment, and ever since it came to power seven years ago it has done nothing to improve the lot of the people. They have enjoyed all the privileges of being part of the regime at the expense of the people. The Sudanese people cannot experience worse conditions than at present, they are prepared to accept anything that might help oust their regime."

However, he insisted that only the Sudanese themselves could topple the regime, and that any intervention by foreign powers would not be in Sudan's interest. "Any foreign power will eventually ask for a price, and that will be our own sovereignty and independence."

Abu Issa reiterated Al-Tayeb's view that the Sudanese people's suffering was already so great that it would be hard to make matters worse. "What more can sanctions add?" he asked. Comparing Sudan's case with that of Iraq and Libya, he said that sanctions against Sudan would this time hit at the regime itself. "The people are already isolated."

## A question of consensus

Since Liamine Zouarou was confirmed as Algerian president in elections last November, his regime appears to have grown in confidence. Having acquired legitimacy and consensus of popular support, Zouarou announced the commencement of a national dialogue aimed at achieving national reconciliation after four years of violence and political unrest in the country. The significant shift in the Algerian regime's posture was underscored by their bold decision to exclude the banned Islamic Salvation Front (FIS) from the talks.

Various prominent politicians with loose links to the FIS, such as Abdel-Hamid Mehri, former secretary-general of the National Liberation Front (FLN), and former Foreign Minister Ahmed

Taleb Al-Ibrahimi, have also been excluded from the talks.

The talks which began on Saturday are expected to last for at least two weeks. Zouarou is expected to hold meetings with political leaders, former government personalities, trade unionists and social organisations.

Zouarou's decision to shun the FIS not only reflects a turning point in his government's policy towards the Islamist group, but also underscores its growing conviction that a solution to Algeria's woes can be achieved without enlisting the FIS in the process. However, political observers argue that Zouarou is not holding a national dialogue in the real sense of the word, but just a series of talks on the

Will Algeria's third attempt to achieve a national consensus prove successful without the Islamic Salvation Front, asks **Amira Howeydy**

framework of the next parliamentary elections, expected to be held at the beginning of 1997.

Some political figures who have already spoken to Zouarou confirmed these comments and said the discussions did not touch on the current political situation or the possibility of a future dialogue which includes the FIS.

In a telephone interview from Algiers, Abdel-Aziz Belkhadem, former speaker of the Algerian parliament, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that he queried

the purpose of the current talks when he met Zouarou. "I asked him if the dialogue aims at solving the political crisis or if it is just a preparation for the next elections," he said. "He replied that each aim requires a different method to achieve it." Belkhadem said the dialogue had so far been trying to reach a consensus on the next parliamentary and local council elections.

Asked if the exclusion of the FIS is permanent, Belkhadem said, "It will be permanent until the FIS takes certain measures such as clearly condemning vi-

olence... As for the government, it has to embrace other essential principles such as a multi-party system before actual political reconciliation is achieved."

Coming five months after Zouarou was elected, the dialogue is the third in a series of attempts to put an end to the state of insurgency which broke out in 1992. The first round of reconciliation talks, held at the beginning of 1994, was sponsored by the then temporary Prime Minister Ahmed Ghazali. Ghazali headed the government after the abrupt and forced resignation of former President Chadli Ben Jaid in 1991. The talks, which included the FIS, ended in failure and were followed by the army's appointment of Zouarou — defence minister at the time — to the presidency.

Zouarou then held a second national dialogue that comprised the major political parties — including the FIS. Bilateral talks between the FIS and the military government ended in failure, however, due to mutual distrust. The FIS rejected the conditions laid down by Zouarou because the group was offered only limited political participation in return for a pledge to renounce violence.

Zouarou no doubt feels he can pursue the current dialogue without the FIS because he now has the legitimating factor of a national election backing his position as president. The FLN, the Socialist Forces Front (FFS), Al-Nahda Islamic Movement and the Rally for Culture and Democracy (RCD) — among other FIS "allies" — have accepted Zouarou's invitation to join the dialogue, thereby signalling a significant shift in their relations with the government. The participation of these parties in the talks also reflects their eagerness to enter next year's parliamentary elections.

Nevertheless, the leaders of these groups maintain that Algeria's protracted political crisis will not be resolved unless the most powerful party, the FIS, participates in the discussions. Al-Nahda leader Abdallah Jellal said that, with the exclusion of the FIS, "we will return to the 'dead' dialogues we had before... since the essence of the crisis is between the FIS and the government."

However, Belkhadem believes that the FIS will continue to be rejected by the govern-

ment, "as long as the situation remains unchanged". Only if "there is genuine goodwill and an earnest desire to reach a comprehensive solution, together with the participation of all political forces, will there be a significant breakthrough," he said.

Others argue that the exclusion of the FIS could be attributed to the fact that the government is satisfied with its "good" relations with the Islamist movements Hamas and Al-Nahda. Hamas leader Mahfouz Nehmah received 25 per cent of the votes in last year's presidential elections, taking second place behind Zouarou. According to some, the government is not prepared to tolerate any form of political Islam more extreme than Nehmah's "Islamic slice".

"Last November's presidential elections provided Islamists other than the FIS with an opportunity to have a share in the government," Dina Rashwan, an Egyptian expert on Algerian affairs, told the *Weekly*. "The reshaping of the Islamic political map destroyed the FIS's monopoly. But that does not imply they will be totally excluded from next year's elections," he said.

"It is highly unlikely that the regime will allow the FIS to exceed Nehmah's 25 per cent if the elections are held, meaning that Zouarou will probably strike a deal with the FIS. If this transpires, Zouarou will finally have the upper hand and not the FIS," he added.

Rashwan explained that the outcome of the latest presidential elections makes this scenario highly probable. The elections gave Zouarou full legitimacy as Algeria's president, which enabled him to compete with the FIS's legitimacy as the country's most popular political party. The FIS was set to win the 1991 parliamentary elections when the military cancelled the poll and seized power. "The FIS's justification for the state of insurgency was that they had a legitimate claim that was usurped. But this claim is less effective after the November presidential elections," said Rashwan.

Belkhadem sees matters differently. He believes that the government might modify the constitution to ban the formation of Islamic parties. "But this measure, if taken, will be met with strong resistance from many quarters," he said.

## Militant rumblings in Libya

A menacing militant presence threatens to spill out of Libya into neighbouring countries, writes **Sayed Awad**

Sporadic reports coming out of Libya have revealed armed clashes between Islamist militant groups and the Libyan regime. This week, travellers arriving at Egypt's coastal town of Marsa Matruh reported that Islamist militants had clashed with Libyans guarding the Egyptian Consulate in Benghazi, in eastern Libya, in an attempt to steal the guards' weapons.

Earlier last month, there were clashes between the army and 400 convicts who had escaped from Benghazi jail. The incident claimed the lives of 19 Libyan officers. Last October, up to five people were reported killed when gunmen went on a rampage through Benghazi. The "Islamic Fighter Group" claimed responsibility for these incidents — a clear indication that Islamist groups have expanded their activities in the country. It seems, therefore, that the militant groups are shifting from underground tactics to open conflict with the regime aimed at destabilising it as a prelude to its overthrow.

Recurrent clashes with government forces are bound to trigger a spiral of violence, in spite of the regime's traditional efficiency in containing militant activities. Till recently, the regime appeared quite capable of imposing deterrent measures to ward off the militant threat and encourage anti-fundamentalist sentiments.

However, given the pressing internal, regional and international challenges facing the regime, the environment seems more conducive to the emergence of a powerful local Islamist opposition. This opposition presents itself as an "alternative" to the status quo and is quite capable of attracting public support, particularly in light of the current intellectual and political chaos reigning in Libya.

Militant Islamism in Libya is a relatively new phenomenon, emerging only in the 1980s. The Islamic Fighter Group, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hezbollah, the Islamic Liberation Party and other smaller and lesser known groups currently constitute the main Islamist forces at work in the country.

The Islamist movement in Libya believes that internal conditions brought about by Libya's isolation on the international scene makes it ripe for the establishment of an Islamic alternative to the existing regime. Libya is currently under siege, and has been enduring economic sanctions since 1992. The Western consensus — on the necessity of toppling Muammar Gaddafi's regime — seems to be showing no signs of wavering.

The militant impetus has also been bolstered by existing Islamist models, which are busy exporting the principles of the "Islamic Revolution", as in the case of Iran. Libya's geographical proximity to these forces — in neighbouring Sudan and Algeria — and the ease of direct contact between them and their followers in Libya have been instrumental in promoting Islamist militancy within the country.

The Libyan regime is aware of the high costs of an escalation of tension at home. Gaddafi has refrained from using violence to suppress the opposition for fear of inciting a vicious circle of internal violence and counter-violence at a time when pressure is also mounting from abroad, particularly in the light of the United States' recent accusation that Libya is building a chemical weapons plant. At this critical stage, the regime can no longer capitalise on the theme of "Islam in confrontation with the West" for fear of indirectly promoting the militant movement.

The Libyan leadership has recently displayed a remarkable capacity for playing the fundamentalist card to serve its own interest in regional and international circles. It has spoken out vociferously against the dangers of the militant resurgence and its growing influence in North Africa. It has also cautioned against the significant danger of Sudan's transformation into an open base and training centre for militant activities.

Reliable sources in Libya have revealed that some of the recent militant attacks were masterminded by elements who illegally entered the country from Sudan and Egypt. And Libyan intelligence agencies have uncovered several Muslim Brotherhood cells among students and young people. It has been reported that these groups, which have links with the Islamic National Front (INF) in Sudan, have spearheaded a number of anti-regime activities. The INF provided training camps and opened communication channels between the Brotherhood inside Libya and their leaders abroad. It is no secret that Sudan has systematically funnelled financial and military support from Iran to militant movements in North Africa.

It seems that the Bashir-Turabi regime has turned its attention to Libya since the wave of violence in Egypt abated and Islamists in Algeria were largely excluded from mainstream politics. Undoubtedly, an escalation of violence in Libya would threaten Egypt's national security and Libya would cease to be a buffer against the spread of extremism in North Africa. The Gaddafi regime has recently signalled that it is prepared to cooperate in the struggle to suppress the surge in Islamist militancy in the country and in North Africa as a whole. Egyptian co-ordination with Libya to enforce security measures and facilitate the exchange of information seems inevitable.

As for the West, it can no longer afford to ignore the situation in Libya. There are two options available to Western nations. They could adopt a softer policy line towards the Libyan regime, particularly in light of the latter's apparent willingness to take a more moderate position, or alternatively they could maintain the status quo. Admittedly, if the West opts for the second alternative, the Gaddafi regime could crumble under mounting internal unrest. The West, meanwhile, could extend assistance to the liberal opposition abroad to help bring it to power. However, this is a far from ideal scenario: Libya would be dragged into internal strife which would drain its resources, and in the interim, the nation could turn into another base for militant activities, hitting at targets in neighbouring states after the fashion of the recent attack on the Egyptian Consulate in Benghazi.

**Dr. Abdel Kader Hatem is scheduled to open**  
**The 17th Annual Fine Art Exhibition**  
The Cairo Art Guild  
The Italian Cultural Centre  
Wednesday 17th April 1996 7.00 PM  
The exhibition will remain open until 25th April 1996

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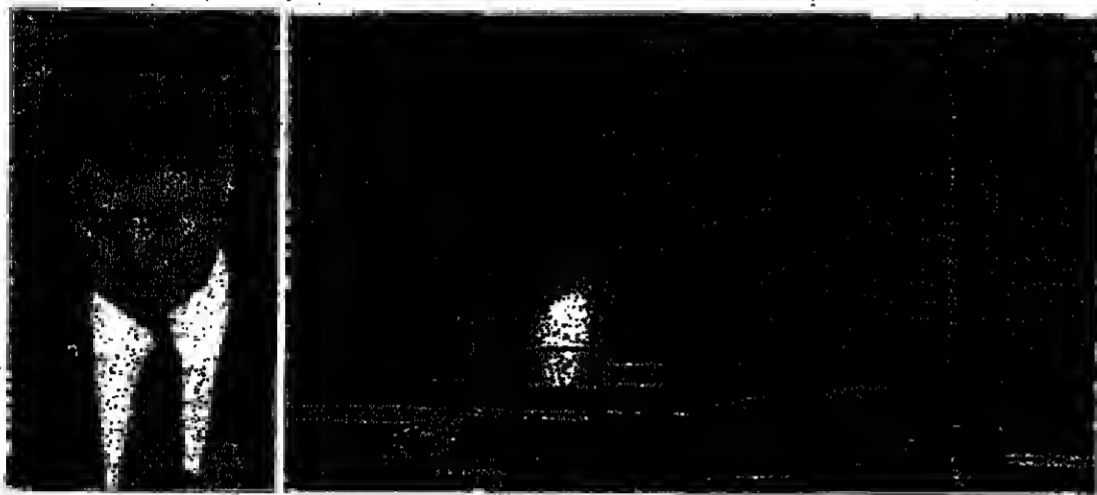
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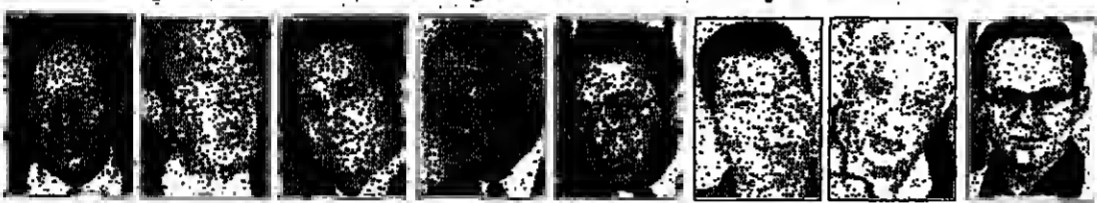
Président  
et Rédacteur en Chef  
**Ibrahim Nafie**

# Peace under arms

Assessing the political motives behind a restructured Israeli army, a study by an eminent Egyptian military research centre concludes that arms limitation is not on Israel's agenda for peace. **Galal Nassar** reviews part one



Will Clinton's promise of continued American guarantees for Israel's security extend to its Dimona reactor?



Perry Christopher Barak Rabin Arens Shamron Sharon Schiff

A recent study entitled *Armed Peace*, compiled by El-Nasr Centre for Strategic and Military Studies in Egypt, indicates that Israel found itself entangled in a debate over the future of its military establishment after the 1991 Gulf War, or Desert Storm. The highly developed, high-technology weapons used by the US-led alliance against Iraq marked a significant shift away from traditional warfare and triggered a quest for an optimum Israeli defence strategy.

Israel zealously tackled the development of its arsenal not just to match the latest technological warfare devices used in the 1991 Gulf War, but to maintain a policy upheld by its original founders, the leaders of the Zionist movement. They believed that Israel's existence depended on its military superiority in the region. According to Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion, Israel could only guarantee its survival if it remained "a nation in arms".

The study cites in support of its findings recent statements by Israeli military and foreign ministry officials, including those traditionally known for their discretion. These statements reinforced the Israeli view that the country's military superiority was the main factor behind the Arabs' participation in the Middle East peace process.

In an interview with the Israeli daily *Davar* in 1993, current Israeli Foreign Minister Ezer Weizman, who was army chief-of-staff at the time, commented on security arrangements following the Palestinian-Israeli peace agreements. "The Israeli army needs to be strong even in this period when there are clear ringing tones of peace," he said.

Former Israeli Defence Minister Moshe Arens was reported to have said that his country's military superiority gave Arabs the impression that it was impossible to destroy the Jewish state and that, therefore, they had no option but to accept its existence.

The study also shows that even after signing separate peace agreements with Egypt, Jordan and the Palestinians, Israel did not abandon its war-like tone. At the time, the late Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin bluntly remarked that a "powerful" Israel must always be prepared for war, in the medium and long term. Senior Arab officials protested

at such statements which they considered detrimental to and inconsistent with the region's drive towards peace. President Hosni Mubarak's senior political advisor, Osama El-Baz, warned that Israeli statements of this kind could prompt Arab countries to reconsider their positions on the peace process.

The study moves on to the process of restructuring the Israeli army since the end of the '80s. It reviews the major changes that Israeli governments introduced into the country's armed forces in order to equip it with the latest technological advances. Restructuring included streamlining ground, naval and air forces and focusing on improving their efficiency and deterrence systems.

The main motive behind these changes was to convince Arabs of the futility of resorting to armed conflict, as Rabin, who was Israel's defence minister at that time, stated. The study also cites economic pressures and the need to cut military expenditure as other reasons behind the restructuring of Israel's army.

The outcome of the 1991 Gulf War, which followed the dissolution of the former Soviet Union, consolidated the US's position as the world's only superpower. This bolstered Israel's strong position in the Middle East. Not only was Iraq's army, one of the strongest in the region, destroyed, but unprecedented US support of Israel was demonstrated.

Yet the war also had a negative impact on Israel, according to the study. The war showed that Israel's security could be threatened. The few Iraqi Scud missiles that hit Israel proved that Israelis were vulnerable.

In response, two main trends emerged within Israel. The first was championed by Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres. Peres' vision for the future of the Middle East in the post-Gulf War period underscored the importance of reaching a political settlement with Arab states, even if this entailed giving up territories occupied by Israel in 1967. Peres argued that missiles did not stop at borders and hence a new vision was needed to transcend borders and neutralise potential military threats.

A conflicting view emerged which was favoured by various prominent Israeli politicians and generals who interpreted the outcome of Operation

Desert Storm in quite a different way. Former Likud defence minister, Ariel Sharon, maintained that it was necessary to retain the Occupied Territories as a means of safeguarding Israeli security. Sharon believed that direct US and Western military intervention in the Gulf War had demonstrated Israel's declining strategic importance to the US in the Middle East.

A less pessimistic Israeli view was best expressed by Zeev Schiff, a prominent Israeli political analyst, who said that the strategic alliance between Israel and the US had undergone a subtle, yet necessary, change in order to adapt to the post-Gulf War period. The US would continue to back Israel as unwaveringly as ever, but required it to refrain from aggressive behaviour towards its neighbours.

In a message to Rabin published in its entirety by *Davar* newspaper in 1993, US President Bill Clinton pledged continued American guarantees for Israel's security. Clinton promised to lobby the US Congress to maintain a steady flow of economic and military assistance to Israel and to ensure that Israel had sufficient cash liquidity by extending the repayment period of its military purchases from the US. The American president also pledged to supply Israel with the most advanced military computer systems and put at its disposal 50 F-16B fighter planes. In addition, Clinton announced a \$100 mil-



A US-Israeli defence pact has been on the cards since Ben Gurion's days (photo: AP)

lion American contribution to Israel's military development.

The study by El-Nasr Centre also revealed that Israel's defence establishment embarked on a five-year plan (1992-1997) to restructure the country's armed forces. The main aim of the plan is to "ensure that Israel's army acquires a greater capacity than that of all the Arab armies put together", the study said. Dan Shamron, former army chief-of-staff, said that a smaller Israeli army equipped with the latest technological weapons and backed by an advanced intelligence network is the best deterrent and is far better than a large army which will prove economically taxing to Israel.

The study also revealed that Israel has been sys-

tematically widening the scope of its strategic interests to include countries that are geographically distant. Former Defence Minister Ariel Sharon said that "in addition to neighbouring Arab states, Israel is extending its strategic interests to include North Africa, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and even Zimbabwe".

Former Defence Minister Moshe Arens said that Israel had previously considered neighbouring Arab states the greatest threat to its security, but that lately, the need to guard against threats from countries further afield had gained momentum.

Interestingly, Peres said recently that until Israel made peace with Iran, a country that is not directly involved in the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel would not dismantle its nuclear arsenal.

## Pact of fear

Is the proposed US-Israeli security pact yet another show of solidarity between old allies or an ominous portent, asks **Murad El-Dessouki**

Unknown ghosts stalk the streets of Israel. The assassination of Yitzhak Rabin last year at the hands of Yigal Amir, a Jewish extremist, together with the series of suicide bombings in Tel Aviv, Ashkelon and Jerusalem carried out by Hamas and Jihad, have instilled a sense of terror.

Israeli concern is mounting in the face of a number of possible threatening scenarios: the "Israeli dream" could crumble under a resurgence of Arab resistance from Palestinians living inside Israel or in the self-rule areas; or alternatively, Jewish extremists could commit further acts of violence. In both cases, splits within Israeli society would widen. And Israel fears that a divided nation would be an easy target for both the Palestinian opposition and neighbouring Arab states.

Consequently, from an Israeli standpoint, the Israeli leadership, backed by the United States, must be armed with a strategic deterrent that would provide a psychological, as well as a military, buffer in the event of danger. The deterrent in this case is Israel's nuclear capability, which has become a sticking point in the region and a persistent source of friction with Arab neighbours.

Israel now senses that its nuclear hegemony in the region is becoming more contentious, particularly after reports of a radioactive leakage from its Dimona reactor were circulated.

Last month, *Haaretz* newspaper reported that the Israeli government is campaigning to obtain a written and unprecedented American recognition of its right to retain nuclear weapons — even if comprehensive peace with neighbouring Arab states becomes a reality. This recognition would be concealed in a secret protocol included in a proposed bilateral security pact between Israel and the US.

Following US denials of secret US-Israeli nuclear cooperation, such a protocol appears to be premature. Nevertheless, Israeli Prime Minister Shimon Peres laid the groundwork for a bilateral security pact during a visit to Washington after Rabin's assassination last December. Israel and the US are expected to sign a memorandum of understanding during Peres' trip to the US at the end of this month.

Israeli senior officials — including Peres — are of the view that a US-Israeli strategic military cooperation agreement would give the Israeli public a sense of security and assure them that their country will not have to confront threats to its national security single-handed.

In the view of the Israeli pro-pact camp, a joint security pact with the US would make the existing US-Israeli defence alliance official, and therefore the US would be committed to intervene should Israel find itself under sudden attack. Many believe that such a pact might even give Israel a free hand in its negotiations with Syria.

Nevertheless, some in Israel believe that the pact would shake the very foundations on which Israeli security is based. While politicians believe that it would serve a crucial military and strategic purpose, others, and the Israeli defence establishment in particular, hold quite a different view. The generals fear that the pact would invalidate Israel's principle of self-reliance on the battlefield — a principle Israeli leaders have upheld for nearly 48 years. In the past, Washington supplied Israel with arms and other means to guarantee its military superiority in the region, and in return, Israel guaranteed that not one drop of American blood was lost in Israel's defence. However, under a joint defence pact, Israel would no longer be able to keep its side of the old bargain.

The Israeli defence establishment also voiced concern that a joint defence pact with the US would deprive Israel of its ability to make independent decisions in military operations and to act freely in the event of a confrontation. More importantly, the proposed pact would put Israeli security at the mercy of the outcome of the debate in the Senate, where American politicians are to discuss the pros and cons of an agreement.

The US, for its part, prefers a written accord, which would specify the extent of its military assistance to Israel, meaning that Washington would no longer feel obliged to back every single proposal that Israel deems necessary to safeguard its security in the future. The period following the second Gulf War witnessed a 300 per cent increase in the number of joint US-Israeli cooperation programmes in the production of weapons, particularly the production of missile deterrents and radar systems for fighter planes.

Nevertheless, at the same time, there has been some change in the US's sense of responsibility towards Israel. It is no longer linked to the personality of a particular American president, but is part and parcel of both America's general international strategy and, specifically, its Middle Eastern one. A joint defence pact with the US has been on the cards since Ben Gurion's days, but it is only now that the Israeli leadership has come to consider it so desirable, if not essential, for the preservation of Israeli security.

No one expects the Arab world to protest strongly against such a pact, if it is signed, because the close US-Israeli relationship is no longer a secret to the Arabs. However, a pact that endorses US backing for a nuclear Israel would be a clear violation of international conventions. It would also deliver a devastating blow to the Middle East peace process, destroy Arab hopes for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East and, more importantly, put US credibility as an honest broker in the peace process in jeopardy.

## Palestinian student power

The return of student militancy in the West Bank is the newest weapon in the fight to shape contemporary Palestinian civil society, writes **Graham Usher**

With Palestinians chafing under the sixth week of Israel's closure of the Occupied Territories, recent events have triggered the revival on the Palestinian political scene of what was once a significant player — the mobilising power of Palestinian university students, especially in the West Bank. But the target for the students' renewed anger is not just the blockade and Israel's ongoing occupation. It is equally the oppressive actions taken by their own Palestinian National Authority (PNA) security forces.

On 28 March — in the biggest military operation since the PNA assumed "self-rule" in the West Bank — several hundred Israeli troops arrested 371 Palestinians in pre-dawn raids on three West Bank villages neighbouring Birzeit University, historically a bastion of nationalist militancy. Of those picked up, 280 were students, or nearly 10 per cent of Birzeit's entire student body.

The aim of the raid, said the army, was to round up Gaza students at Birzeit who had disobeyed a military order expelling them to Gaza, issued on 12 March as part of Israel's "internal closure" policies. Birzeit is "a centre for terrorists" (read an army leaflet dropped by helicopter over the Birzeit area) where "wanted persons from Gaza take refuge". Both claims are utterly spurious.

Of the 280 arrested students, a mere 37 were from Gaza, says a worker at Birzeit's Human Rights Project. By the next day, all but 15 students had been released without charge, with Gaza students being shipped back to the Strip. Nor were Islamist "persons" especially targeted. Most arrested were either unaffiliated politically or supporters of Yasser Arafat's Fatah movement who happened to be in the wrong lodging at the wrong time.

Rather, the raid was a massive show of the military might Israel still wields in the West Bank, whether in areas "occupied" or "autonomous" (such as Birzeit). But the political message that underlies it was spelled out by the army's commander of the raid, the IDF's Central Command in the West Bank, Ilan Biran. "For the peace process to succeed, the PNA must continue its campaign against Islamic extremists," he said on 28 March.

And elements of the PNA's security forces acted on cue. On 30 March — less than 48 hours after the Birzeit raid — around 200 Palestinian police stormed the campus of Nablus' An-Najah University. In a show of reckless violence, the police trashed a student rally being held there, using batons, tear gas and live ammunition. Students responded by hurling chairs and flower-pots. Ten students suffered injuries from tear gas inhalation or gunshot while others were detained. As for the motive, this was explained by the PNA's Nablus Chief of Police, Ala Hosi, in almost Biran-like tones: "The opposition [i.e. Hamas] is responsible for this," he said on 30 March. "They are taking advantage of the university's immunity to incite against the PNA." But "they'd better understand there is no immunity in the face of security".

But the "opposition" had not organised the rally at An-Najah. Although the meeting had been held to protest Israeli and PNA arrests of mostly Islamist students, it enjoyed cross-factional support. Most of those arrested and injured in the raid were in fact Fatah members, says head of the Fatah student bloc at the university, Hisham Dweikat. In response, An-Najah's board of trustees denounced the raid as "an attack on academic freedom" and suspended classes for three days. Fatah, meanwhile, issued a state-

ment condemning the police's action as an "affront to all civilized norms". Arafat, clearly shaken, ordered an enquiry.

The combined impact of these events galvanised Palestinian students into action, especially at Birzeit. On 1 April, clashes broke out between students and the Israeli army near the Birzeit campus, leaving nine Palestinians injured, two of them members of the PNA police — on hand to "separate" demonstrators and the army. But the real protest came on 3 April, when Arafat arrived in Ramallah (10 kilometres north of Birzeit) to chair the third session of the newly elected Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC).

Despite attempts at sabotage by members of their own student council (who are also employees of one of the PNA's nine current intelligence services) as well as cordons formed by the Palestinian police, around 1,000 students marched from Birzeit to Ramallah to protest the Israeli and PNA raids. At one point, the police opened fire to disperse the students, but the marchers went on, undeterred. "We have to come to say no to the irresponsible behaviour of the PNA security forces, and to exercise our democratic rights by presenting a petition to our elected council," said Birzeit's (Fatah) student council president, Ibrahim Khreishah.

Aware of the "tense atmosphere", Arafat suspended the PLC and addressed the students outside Ramallah's main PNA military base. Surrounded by nearly 100 police, the president conducted an impromptu and remarkable "dialogue" with his "children". He was their "guest" and the PLC was their "elected representatives", Arafat reassured the students. "Then why did your police shoot at us?" replied a female student from Birzeit.

Arafat eventually agreed to see a delegation of 54 students to discuss their grievances. At it, he vowed that henceforth Palestinian campuses would be "inviolable places" free from police interference, that Ala Hosi would be removed from Nablus and that "special guards" would be assigned to protect all Palestinian universities in the West Bank and Gaza. In an unpublished part of the deal, Arafat also agreed that future PNA/university relations would be "coordinated" by ex-student leaders mutually approved by the PNA and the universities, including their Student Councils.

These measures may appease students' anger, at least temporarily. But reforms like the imposition of PA appointed guards on campuses anger not less PNA "interference" but more. "Why, after 28 years of occupation, do we suddenly need special guards?" said one faculty member at Birzeit. "Are they to defend us from raids by the Palestinian police?"

But the real anxiety motivating the students' recent protests was not just over matters of the universities' right to political and academic freedom. As the Birzeit University President, Hanna Nassar, implies, it was rather driven by the kind of society Palestinians want their future state to be. "It is generally understood that a university's campus is sacrosanct," said Nassar on the day of the An-Najah raid. "While this in no way suggests that the university is above the law, it does mean that it is a place where intellectual and religious plurality is respected and, as such, where one may express views deemed in favour of or against the PNA. We must never forget that personal and academic freedoms are of the highest priority and should be considered the cornerstones of contemporary Palestinian civil society."

## A Third World democrat

Sirimavo Bandaranaike, 80 years old this week, was the world's first elected woman prime minister. **Gamal Nkrumah** remembers a golden leader from a golden age



Bandaranaike with Nasser

Today, the South's politicians often generate public cynicism. Sirimavo Bandaranaike, at the ripe old age of 80, is living proof that political leadership in the Third World can deflect public obsession from the gamesmanship of politics to the enduring political vision of a democratic South — a conviction that democracy stimulates development.

The irony of democracy in the South today is that people do not really trust those who masquerade as popularly elected leaders. The Western-dominated international media capitalises on the Third World's lack of trust in its leadership. It paints a sad picture of political life in the Third World. It portrays the political arenas of the Third World as a playground for the contest among corrupt and scheming political leaders and highlights what it depicts as their inability to cope with public challenges.

In 1960 Sirimavo Bandaranaike became the world's first elected woman prime minister. Last year, she became the world's first prime minister to serve under her own daughter — Sri Lankan President Chandrika Kumaratunga. Bandaranaike set a precedent in South Asia of women inheriting the political mantle of their deceased husbands and fathers. Following in Bandaranaike's footsteps were India's Indira Gandhi, Pakistan's Benazir Bhutto and Bangladesh's Begum Khaleda Zia and Sheikh Hasina. African women politicians, squeezed between the competing demands of patriarchal social norms and economic bread-and-butter issues, have inherited neither a father's nor a husband's political mantle.

Some call this form of power transfer nepotism. "My husband enrolled me in several women's organisations soon after our marriage," Sirimavo Bandaranaike once confessed, "some of them affiliated to politics. He paid my subscriptions faithfully every year, but I cannot recall attending any meetings or taking an active part in them." Be that as it may, Bandaranaike did join an organisation that appealed to her. In 1941, she joined the Lanka Mahila Samati Organisation, which in her own words was "non-partisan politically and intended to ameliorate [wretched] rural conditions and improve the social and economic life of the people, particularly in rural areas."

Bandaranaike was among the first Third World leaders to initiate radical land reform policies. She instituted the seizure of the Port of Colombo, the island-nation's chief port, and the country's largest naval base at Trincomalee from the British. Bandaranaike oversaw sweeping agrarian and land reforms: those owning more land than a stipulated ceiling had the extra acres confiscated by the state and handed over to the tillers. Bandaranaike, herself a landowner, handed over all the excess land in her possession to the tillers.

Gone are the days of political campaigns designed to appeal to the poor and disadvantaged masses — militant rhetoric, across-the-board nationalisations and land reform. Today, Third World nations, including Sri Lanka, are courting foreign investors. Bandaranaike spearheaded the nationalisation in 1962 of British and American business interests and was voted out of office in 1965. She was returned to office in 1970, crushed a Marxist uprising in 1972 and was voted out of office again in 1977, when J.R. Jayawardene became Sri Lanka's first president after the country adopted a presidential system of government. Bandaranaike's name leapt back into the limelight in 1989 when she became prime minister again.

Politics is played at the edge of familial scandal and taboo, and South Asia has had its fair share of patrimonial disputes and vendettas. Bangladesh, for instance, has two leading families that have been feuding for years. Former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina is the daughter of Bangladesh's founding father, Sheikh Mujibur Rahman, who was assassinated in 1975 — three months before General Khaleda Zia seized power. Hasina suspects that the general had a hand in the murder of her father and cannot forgive his widow, Prime Minister Zia. The fact that the two leading Bangladeshi politicians are at loggerheads is no great mystery. What is surprising is that the Bangladeshi electorate and media have become interested parties to the dispute and often fuel the backbiting.

The turn of events raises worrying questions about the immediate future of both Africa and South Asia — the world's two poorest regions. The common thread in both the sub-Saharan and South Asian subcontinents, it can be argued, has been an inability to shake off the legacy of a colonial past. Other regions, most notably South East Asia, have succeeded. Africa is poor and undemocratic; South Asia is poor but democratic. Popular discontent in Africa often surfaces in tribal and religious form. Popular discontent in South Asia often surfaces in caste and communal form.

One of the most noticeable differences between Africa and South Asia is that while in the latter public opinion matters, in Africa it does not. This week, a United Nations four-man observer mission toured Nigeria, Africa's most populous country with 120 million people, and met with Kudirat Abiola, wife of imprisoned opposition leader Alhaji Moshood Abiola. She complained about his deteriorating health. He is widely believed to have won the 1993 presidential elections and was jailed in June 1994. As Nigeria, with a quarter of the continent's population, languishes under military dictatorship, it is small wonder Africa's democratisation prospects look so bad.

People will only pay attention to politicians if they think they will give them something they want and do not have, let them keep something they have but feel they are losing, or tell them something they must know — something that is in their own best interests. So how do national politicians in the Third World engage their national public today?

The difficulty lies with the tasks that are set: engaging the general public and gratifying rival interest groups. In the 1950s, when Africans and Asians were struggling to end European colonialism, the difference between the two tasks was blurred. Today the difference has become abundantly clear. The elections of the political leaders of the newly independent states were quite literally entire nations toiling under the yoke of colonialism. The elections of today's Third World leaders are often manipulated by select representatives of very often antagonistic military, ethnic, communal or business interest groups. Under such constraints it is impossible for a national politician to pretend that his, or her, constituency is an entire nation. In other words, it is very difficult for a Third World leader, presiding over a third-rate economy, to engage the public. But Bandaranaike has.

President Chandrika Kumaratunga, like her mother Prime Minister Bandaranaike, possesses a much prized presidential virtue — a new vision. She is a new-world leader with old-world airs. But she has to grapple with a problem that has eluded many Sri Lankan leaders — that of taking the proverbial tiger by the tail. The tiger in question here is the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). Hers is a difficult task.

The international world order has changed considerably since 1956, when Bandaranaike's husband, S.W.R.D. Bandaranaike, led his island-nation to independence. He was assassinated two years later and she took over his political mantle. Her contemporaries say it took great courage, a steady determination and an unwavering political vision to be the world's first woman prime minister. Bandaranaike has had two careers: the public national leader and the private homemaker. But what does she, a South Asian political leader, represent for the post-independence generation in Africa?

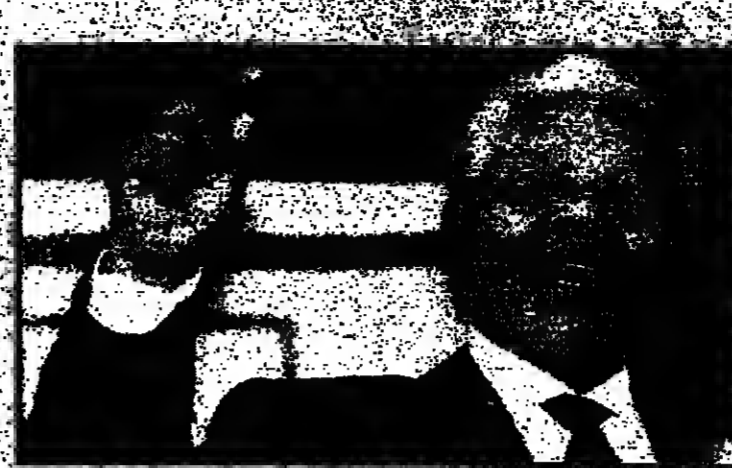
There are many reasons why Bandaranaike continues to be one of Sri Lanka's best loved national political figures abroad. In the Third World, her name conjures up the ideals of a golden age — the national liberation era. Then, political leaders evinced much concern with the plight of the ordinary man — and women. Champions of the underdog are hard to find today. It is not so much the ability to concentrate on a vision to the exclusion of all other matters that endears her to many far removed from the daily concerns of her island-nation's shores. It is the way in which her vision and her endeavours are interwoven in an intricate canopy of political successes and comebacks. Considering that most of her contemporaries are long gone, this in itself is no mean achievement.

Women political leaders who manage to reach the very top of their countries' political pyramids, let alone hang onto the trappings of power for so long, are very few. Bandaranaike represents continuity and solidity in times of rapid and radical social changes. Her leadership is a stabilising social force in a time when the chasm between public personae and private lives has widened considerably.

What's in a name? In Bandaranaike's name there is something of the certainties of a bygone age. The name Bandaranaike itself, like Nkrumah, Nasser, Nehru, and Soekarno, conjures up in our imaginations fond images of Third World solidarity.



President Hosni Mubarak



South Africa's Nelson Mandela



Zambia's Kenneth Kaunda



Zaire's Mobutu Sese Seko



Tanzania's Julius Nyerere

## ... And after Pelindaba?

The signing of the Pelindaba Treaty in Cairo today will not mean the end of the road for Egypt's efforts in worldwide nuclear disarmament, writes **Gamil Ibrahim** in Geneva

The formal title of the treaty establishing the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (ANWFZ) is the African Nuclear Weapon Free Zone Treaty. African states chose this title to underscore the fact that it is a treaty for the military de-nuclearisation of Africa. African states are still permitted to benefit from the application of nuclear technology for peaceful purposes of economic and social development. The treaty, which took 36 years to prepare, will be referred to as the Treaty of Pelindaba, using the name of the area near Pretoria where South Africa's Atomic Energy Corporation is based.

The name Pelindaba was first suggested in talks to finalise the draft of the treaty in a meeting of 13 experts on 2 June 1995. The Egyptian representative at this meeting was not opposed to this name since he recognised South Africa's leading role in making the treaty possible. The convention, however, is to name NWFFZ treaties after the place where their final signing takes place. The 1967 treaty making Latin America and the Caribbean a NWFFZ — the Treaty of Tlatelolco — and the

1985 South Pacific equivalent, known as the Treaty of Rarotonga, both follow this convention.

The discussions that ended with the Pelindaba Treaty actually began in 1960 when, confronted with French nuclear testing in the Sahara desert, several African states launched an effort to de-nuclearise Africa. That year marked the true genesis of the proposal to establish an African NWFFZ. One year later, at the initiative of African states, the first resolution of the UN General Assembly on the establishment of a NWFFZ was approved. The resolution of 24 November 1961 was entitled "consideration of Africa as a de-nuclearised zone".

Nearly three years later in July 1964, the first African regional document on the subject, the Declaration on the De-nuclearisation of Africa, was drawn up by the Organisation of African Unity. Sola Ogunbanwo, the chief expert adviser to the African NWFFZ, says: "Essentially, the African NWFFZ Treaty will fulfil the function of preventing a nuclear arms race on the continent. It will prevent Af-

frican and extra-regional states from introducing nuclear explosive devices into Africa. It will prevent the danger of atomic radiation. In addition to non-proliferation, the treaty will promote African cooperation in the various uses of nuclear technology for economic and social development."

After Pelindaba, Egypt's primary concern is the establishment of a NWFFZ in the Middle East. Munir Zahran, Egypt's ambassador to the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, highlighted this policy on 28 March, when he said: "In the efforts of non-proliferation and nuclear disarmament, a step will be realised by the signing in Cairo on 11 April 1996 of the African NWFFZ to which all five nuclear weapon states were invited. For the gradual attainment of nuclear disarmament worldwide, we appeal for the early establishment of the NWFFZ in the Middle East as progress towards a comprehensive peaceful settlement is being realised."

Zahran pointed out the strong fears felt by Egypt and other countries in the Middle East because of the news that Israel's Dimona nu-

clear reactor was leaking radiation as a result of recent earthquakes in the region. "If nuclear disarmament is to be the private business of only the five nuclear weapon states, what is to happen to those nuclear weapons in the possession of other states which are not legally bound not to possess them?" he asked. "By the same token we are concerned by the lack of implementation of article six of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) which stipulated when it was signed in 1968 that the cessation of the nuclear arms race and nuclear disarmament would take place 'at an early date'. This has not been attained 28 years later."

Moreover, as far as the South is concerned, there is still much more to be done. The Group of 21 (leading Third World nations), which includes Egypt, has demanded that an independent item on nuclear disarmament be included on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament and that negotiations on the subject begin immediately after the conclusion of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty in Geneva later this year.

## Diego Garcia's nuclear shadow

The Pelindaba Treaty is to have a profound influence on African security, **Murad El-Dessouki** reviews the historical development of the concept of de-nuclearising Africa

Africa will become the fourth region in the world to be declared a nuclear weapon-free zone, after South America, Antarctica and the South Pacific. In fact, with today's signing of the Pelindaba Treaty in Cairo, the whole of the southern hemisphere will be covered by nuclear-free zone treaties.

Historically, Africa was one of the continents most affected by nuclear activity. This was not due to nuclear activities undertaken by countries on the continent, but rather because of the nuclear activities of European powers, and especially France. Israel was also an active nuclear player in the African continent. In February 1960, France detonated its first nuclear bomb in the Algerian Sahara, although a treaty halting nuclear tests for five years was signed by the United States, Britain and the Soviet Union in 1958. France detonated three bombs above ground in the Sahara Desert and then, after 1961, began underground tests there.

The French nuclear tests in the Algerian desert roused the concern of many countries on the continent. Nine African nations launched a plan to de-nuclearise the continent. They protested the French nuclear tests in the Sahara at the United Nations in 1960 and asked for Africa to be made into a nuclear-free zone. They demanded that nu-

clear tests should not be carried out on African soil and that nuclear waste should not be stored in or transported within Africa. Nothing was done about the African proposals that year. However, a year later, at the initiative of African states, the first resolution of the UN General Assembly on the establishment of a nuclear weapon-free zone on the continent was approved.

African nations gathered support for the "Declaration on the De-nuclearisation of Africa", which was issued by the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) in July 1964. However, the continent's main nuclear power was not party to the OAU agreement. In fact, South Africa was at the time not even a member of the OAU. Soviet and American satellites spotted South Africa's nuclear tests in the Kalahari Desert in 1977. Britain, France and the US all exerted pressure on South Africa to stop its testing, but the country's nuclearisation process continued unabated from the headquarters of the South African Atomic Energy Corporation in Pelindaba, near the capital Pretoria.

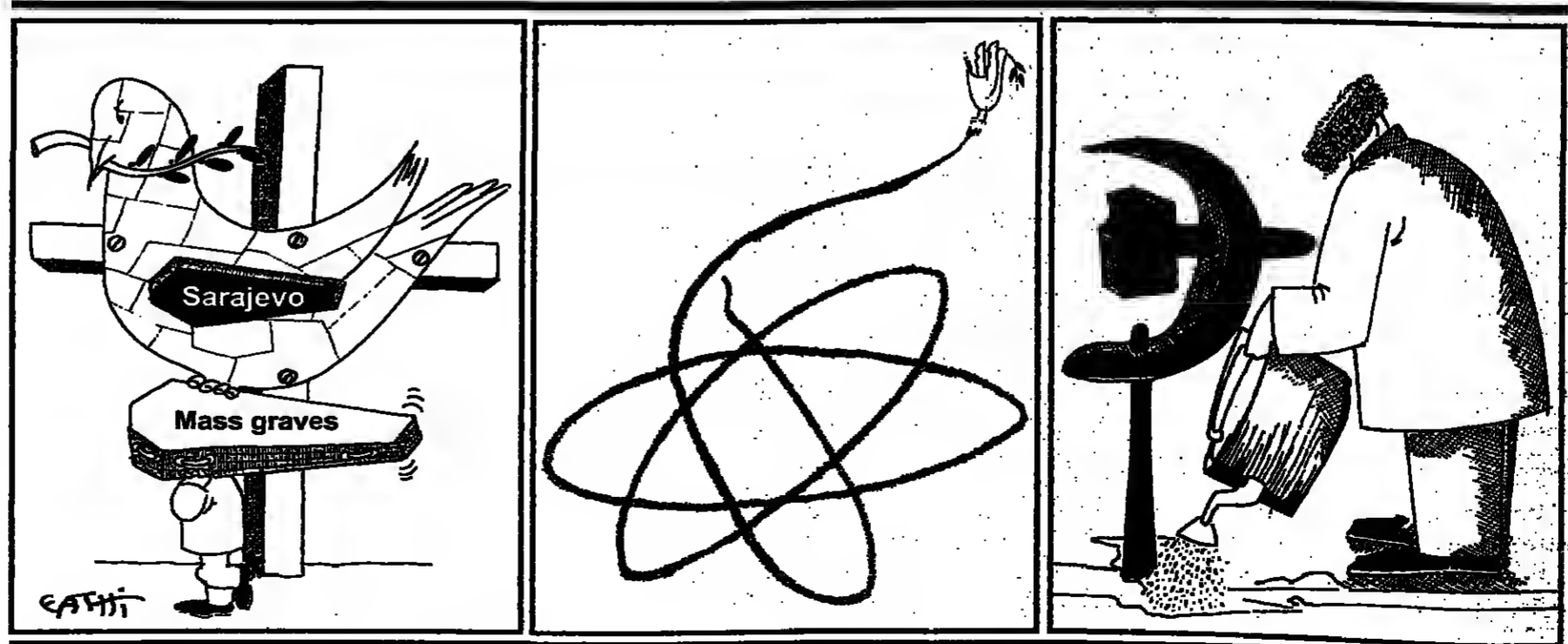
Pretoria refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and conclude adequate safety agreements with the International Atomic Energy Agency. With the intensification of the international campaign

against the apartheid system in the 1970s and 1980s, South Africa continued its military incursions into the territories of neighbouring African states. Moreover, South Africa began cooperating more closely with Israel in nuclear technology. The two countries pooled their resources in developing one of the world's most advanced nuclear systems.

It was against this background that in 1990, the African states at the UN headquarters in New York met in a session on how to transform the OAU 1964 declaration into a treaty format. A draft resolution was approved by the UN General Assembly in December 1990 — Resolution 45/56A. It was the forerunner of the Pelindaba Treaty. South Africa today is a fully fledged member of the OAU and is the only country in the world to have got rid of its nuclear weapons capability. Pretoria is also party to the NPT. The Pelindaba Treaty will establish the African Commission on Nuclear Energy (AFCON) to supervise the implementation of the treaty, with its headquarters in South Africa. Pretoria's role in the AFCON is pivotal, for South Africa remains the country on the continent with the most advanced nuclear technology — now being used only for peaceful purposes.

Pelindaba will fulfil the function of preventing a nuclear arms race on the African continent, but it does not stop external nuclear powers from testing in waters off the continent. The island of Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean archipelago of Chagos is a British possession. But part of the island has been let out to the US for military purposes and nuclear warships have been sighted near the island. Diego Garcia is about 3,600km off the eastern coastline of Africa and commands a strategic location in the middle of the Indian Ocean.

The touchy issue of Diego Garcia is causing much concern in Africa and Asia. There are several issues at stake. First and foremost is the legitimate security concerns of the nations bordering the Indian Ocean. Secondly, there is the nuclear and conventional military presence of the US and Britain on the island. It is for this last reason that representatives from Britain, the US and France will be present at the signing of the Pelindaba Treaty in Cairo today. The problem of Diego Garcia is one that casts a shadow of doubt on the efficacy of Pelindaba when it comes to protecting Africa from external nuclear powers. The suspected Israeli nuclear tests in the Negev desert and its nuclear programme at Dimona is another.





A Bosnian soldier and government officials recover parts of human remains in Sarajevo. Local Bosnian authorities are now intensifying the search for the missing (photo:AFP)

## Bosnia picks up the pieces

After years of war and economic ruin, Bosnia is ready for reconstruction. Mariz Tadros sounded out the men in the field

In the heart of Sarajevo, on a former front-line bridge, city officials laid a plaque this week in honour of the first victim of Bosnia's four-year bloody war. As Bosnian citizens pick up the pieces of their shattered lives, the World Bank, the United States and the European Union are struggling to revive a shattered Bosnian economy. At an international conference held in Sarajevo last month and organised by the World Bank, the European Commission and the government of Bosnia-Herzegovina, delegates from public and private sectors were invited to inspect the economic conditions in Bosnia, pledge humanitarian aid and explore possible investment ventures there.

Bosnia has recently joined the World Bank and secured \$269 million for economic development. It is predicted, however, that the country will need \$5.1 billion over the next four years to recover from the devastating impact of war. The World Bank hopes that at the next conference, scheduled for 12-13 April in Brussels, donations from donor countries will surpass the \$1.8 billion mark.

However, according to Enver Ibragic, financial director at the Public Enterprise for PTT Transport in Bosnia, the \$5.1 billion estimate is unrealistic. Ibragic, who is a member of a visiting Bosnian delegation to Egypt, told *Al-Ahram Weekly* that "every aspect of the economy is completely destroyed: industry, infrastructure, communications, agriculture, all". He said his enterprise was hoping to establish bilateral links with Egyptian public and private enterprises, with aspirations for some joint ventures in the communications field. "Communications alone will cost over \$2.5 billion to repair in Bosnia, since all networks were completely destroyed," he said. "We lived for 14 months with no telephone lines to the outside world and for three and a half years the post office was not working. Our telephone exchange has just recently started working." Ibragic insisted that despite the high risk factor in Bosnia, investing in the country was profitable.

"We haven't enough money. We need a lot of investment," said Ibragic. Ibragic, president of the Regional Chamber of Commerce in Tuzla, Bosnia's second largest city, who is also visiting Egypt as part of the Bosnian delegation. He estimated that Tuzla alone would need \$1 billion in the coming years for redeveloping its industrial

base, Tuzla, which is known as the industrial powerhouse of Bosnia, was completely demolished during the war.

"Tuzla has highly developed factories and production plants," Ibragic told the *Weekly*, adding that "fuel, spare parts, equipment and raw materials" are desperately needed to get the industries back into operation. But Tuzla's power grids survived the war, he said, and the economic potential is enormous.

Ibragic insisted that friendly relations with neighbouring Croatia and Serbia were integral for the development of Bosnia's economy. "We must live together peacefully with the Croats and Serbs," he said. "Bosnia must survive as a multi-cultural place." In a recent television interview in Bosnia, President Alija Izetbegovic complained that Croatian and Serbian intervention in Bosnia's domestic affairs, and their hold on Croatian and Serbian communities there, were obstructing post-war economic revival in his country. "They don't allow the US to put our country in order. The traces lead to Belgrade and Zagreb," he said. Ibragic, however, insisted that economic cooperation between Bosnia and Croatia was strong. "We have problems with Croatia but the situation today is much better than it was before," he said. "There is still cooperation in fields such as industry and health care."

Rafat El-Kafoury, head of the technical affairs and tendering section at the giant Egyptian contracting and construction company, Arab Contractors, was a member of the Egyptian delegation that visited Bosnia last month. He told the *Weekly*, "It is a tragedy whichever way you look at it. Bosnia has been totally destroyed, totally. There is no infrastructure, no electricity, no water, no sewage system, no lighting; it has all been ravaged." He said that because Sarajevo's airport was strictly for the use of NATO peacekeeping forces they had to go from Zagreb and Split and then take a 10-hour bus ride across the mountains to reach Sarajevo. "Normally a bus ride between Split to Sarajevo would only take three hours," he said.

Arab Contractors has decided to open a branch office in Sarajevo. El-Kafoury explained that they had struck a deal with the Egyptian government in which the latter would help fund Arab Contractors plans "to help in the

reconstruction of demolished buildings such as schools and hospitals and in the recreation of an infrastructure". In a report compiled after his visit to Bosnia, El-Kafoury noted that 50 per cent of school buildings were damaged and 58 per cent of power stations were destroyed in the war. Repairing the transport networks in Bosnia will cost an estimated \$124 million in the first year.

Since factories producing asphalt, cement and metal are not operating, Arab Contractors will have to import the basic raw materials for construction, "probably from neighbouring countries such as Croatia, Poland or Romania, whichever is cheapest", El-Kafoury said. As for labour, El-Kafoury pointed out that "there is a highly qualified and cheap labour force in Bosnia... Inflation is high and salaries have dropped radically. For example, an engineer earns 100 marks and an executive secretary earns 50 marks, which is about LE100." Since it is winter, the ground is frozen and most of the food has to be imported. "The food is scarce and expensive," El-Kafoury said. "The trees in the streets have been chopped down by inhabitants who use the wood for heating since there is no electricity, heating or water in their homes."

"The situation there is devastating," said Professor Maged Zayed, director of Ain Shams Specialised Hospital, who was also a member of the Egyptian delegation which visited Bosnia last month. "Hospitals and clinics are paralysed because the basic living requirements such as lighting and water are lacking. You can imagine the living conditions there when the average temperature in winter is -26 degrees Celsius and there is no heating." Zayed told the *Weekly*, "Bosnian doctors left during the war and the two main hospitals in Bosnia are working with 10 per cent of their staff. In emergency situations, you find doctors making do with whatever equipment is available... Sometimes they have to manufacture their own tools, like the nails put in fractured knees."

Ain Shams Hospital has agreed as part of the government's aid-to-Bosnia programme to provide medical training for graduate students in Bosnia so that they can meet the needs of their patients. It remains to be seen whether international intervention will alleviate another crisis in Bosnia, this time of a crippling economic kiod.

## Where opportunity never knocks

Between 1969 and 1989, America cut its education budget by 25 per cent and increased funding for the criminal justice system by 400 per cent. Does institutional racism account for such a discrepancy, wonders Keith Jennings

Last week, the American State Department settled a race discrimination law suit by agreeing to pay \$3.8 million to African American diplomats. The department also agreed, in an unprecedented decision, to grant retroactive promotions to 17 of the plaintiffs and pay \$2.1 million in legal fees to the diplomats' lawyers as part of an agreement to end the federal suit filed in 1986. The suit applied to some 300 African Americans who have served in the United States Foreign Service since 1984. The State Department still denies the settlement that it has discriminated against its African American employees. However, the law suit brought to the fore the many grievances of African Americans about discrimination against them in criminal justice, health and education.

Access to health care is a human right protected under Article 24 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and in the International Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The existence in the US of 40 million persons who do not possess any form of health insurance suggests that millions more probably do not have meaningful access to adequate health care. Today the health status of people of colour is a social index showing the desperate conditions confronting national minority groups.

African Americans, for instance, are the only racial group in the US to have suffered a decrease in life expectancy over the past decade. Fully 25 per cent of the African-American population have no health insurance. Access to health care has also been impaired as urban and rural hospitals serving African Americans and other poor residents have been closed due to financial crises in states and cities. Moreover, close to 75,000 above the normal level deaths occur in the African American community annually.

African Americans suffer the highest cancer rates in the US. They are three times as likely to die from AIDS-related illnesses as other sectors of the population. Immunisation of preventable diseases has steadily declined in the African American community. This has led to a tremendous increase in the incidence of communicable diseases, especially among children. African American infant mortality rates are higher than those in many developing countries. One researcher has suggested that if black infants who needlessly died in the first year of birth had survived over the past 40 years, the African American population would consist

of at least half a million more persons.

The main point here is that government inaction has contributed greatly to the deteriorating health status of African Americans. Numerous social factors are related to their poor health status. However, the relationship to poverty is at the centre of that condition.

With respect to access to education, all evidence suggests that a re-segregation of education is occurring. Rising tuition costs, higher admission standards and a shift from grants to loans have collectively limited access to higher education. The cost of attending the average private institution is approximately \$18,000 annually, while the average cost of attending a public institution of higher learning today is about \$10,000. In the face of the reality of one-third of the entire African American population living below the poverty line of \$12,500 and over 20 per cent of the African American population earning less than \$6,000 annually, one can imagine the inability of families to even contemplate sending their children to college. Moreover, the federal government's anti-discriminatory and elitist approach to education has meant the banning of minority scholarships because they supposedly promote discrimination against white males.

The priority of the federal and state governments can be more clearly understood when one considers that, between 1969 and 1989, the US cut its education budget by 25 per cent but increased funding for the criminal justice system by 400 per cent.

Racial discrimination in housing prevents thousands of people from securing adequate and affordable living accommodation. According to one estimate by the Department of Housing and Urban Development, nearly two million instances of racial discrimination occur each year. However, the Justice Department initiated only 17 race discrimination cases nationwide between 1989 and 1992.

Increasingly, the main item of family expenditure in the US is housing. In 1990, 65 per cent of African American families' income was spent on housing. During the 1980s federal policy led to a 75 per cent reduction in housing aid to poor and working people and was clearly connected to the rise in homelessness. The widespread practice of "redlining" — limiting or refusing to give mortgage loans for houses in lighted urban areas — by banks and savings and loans institutions used against African Americans, regardless of their socio-economic status,

violates the Fair Housing Act.

The social development priorities of the US can be observed through numerous other public policy initiatives. Recent efforts to pass jobs bills have failed. Corporations have continued to reduce their workforce in record numbers. And at the very moment when a scientific and technological revolution is under way, children of colour are dropping out of high school and junior high school more than ever.

The national housing policy and national youth policy of the US are best defined by prison construction and incarceration. The Congress approved a \$243 billion defence appropriations bill which was \$7 billion larger than the defence budget requested by the Clinton administration. To pay for increased spending on the military and the building of new prisons, the Republican-controlled Congress has called for dramatic reductions in funds for Medicare, Medicaid, education, environmental protection and a host of other social programmes.

Incarceration in the US has tripled since 1973. America today locks up more people per capita than any other country on the face of the earth. The number of state and federal prison inmates increased by close to 90,000 last year. Today there are more than one million people in state prisons and nearly 100,000 in federal facilities. When added to the inmate population of over half a million in municipal and county jails, it is easy to understand how the US has a rate 8 to 10 times higher than any of the industrialised countries of Western Europe.

Over the past two decades the conservative perspective on punishment has been implemented. That view suggests that crime is out of control, that there is no need to pay attention to rehabilitation and that emphasis should rather be placed on incapacitation and "widening the net" to snare hardened career criminals. The conservative view further suggests that there is nothing that can be done to solve crime except to "get tough with criminals", and if that means building more prisons, then so be it.

To accommodate such views numerous public policy reforms have been instituted. New sentencing guidelines have been elaborated and mandatory minimum sentencing has become the centrepiece of the "get tough on crime" approach. Chain gangs — where prisoners move around with a chain and heavy metal ball tied to their legs — have been brought back to Alabama. Because of the prison construction boom, states such as Texas have constructed huge prisons capable of housing 5,000 prisoners.

These concentration camp-like institutions are today housing prisoners from other states which do not have enough space to keep up with the growth in incarceration.

Whites sell most of the nation's illegal drugs and account for most of the drug abusers. Yet the "war on drugs" has been principally aimed at inner-city black communities. According to a 1992 study by the US Sentencing Commission, 91.3 per cent of those sentenced for federal crack offences were African American, while only three percent were white. Federal penalties related to crack are 100 times more severe than penalties for equal amounts of powder cocaine, which is disproportionately used by whites. The result is a prison population that is more than 50 per cent black. Black men account for only six per cent of the US population.

The overall cost of incarceration including construction, maintenance and renovation is now close to \$100 billion annually. Spending on prison construction and maintenance is the fastest growing part of state and local budgets. It is estimated that by the year 2000, incarceration will have doubled, reaching a level of almost 2,500,000 people.

The issue of capital punishment perhaps best typifies the institutionalised racist violence committed against "poor people through the criminal justice system in the US. Forty-one per cent of the death row population in the US are African Americans. Another nine per cent is composed of national minorities from other racial groups. Of all those executed since executions began again in 1977, more than 85 per cent were sentenced for killing whites. At the federal level, of all the cases approved for capital punishment 80 per cent were minorities. African Americans alone constitute 66 per cent of the total. Anti-discrimination law in the US theoretically guarantees equal protection under the law and precludes any state from denying its inhabitants that protection. However, the reality is different and getting worse.

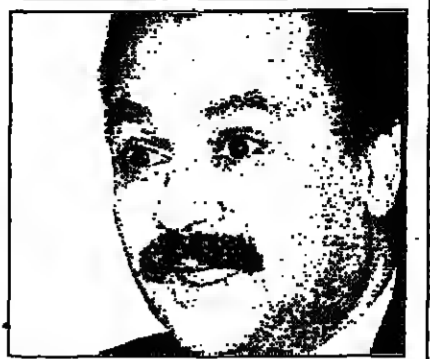
The struggle of ordinary people for basic human rights and fundamental freedoms in the US will continue until full equality is achieved. The challenge of overcoming racism and racial discrimination in all its forms and manifestations will continue to be central to that struggle.

The writer is the executive director of the African American Human Rights Foundation.

Edited by Gamal Nkrumah

## Ron Brown

By James Zogby



Secretary of Commerce Ron Brown was my friend. Not only that, he was a friend of the Arab American community.

I have written before about Ron's role as secretary, about his commitment to economic development for Palestinians and his desire to expand the US partnership with the Arab world. The story of how he became a champion for the rights of Arab Americans must also be told.

We founded the Arab American Institute in 1985. Fresh from our experiences in the 1984 Jesse Jackson for President campaign and the Reagan-Bush re-election effort, we launched Arab American Institute (AAI) as a bipartisan political organisation to secure an Arab American role in both the Democratic and Republican parties.

Our Republican colleagues did quite well. They formed a national federation of Republican clubs and were recognised by the national party.

But as Democrats, we encountered serious obstacles. Although we formed about 20 local Arab American Democratic clubs and a national federation, the national party would not recognise us. Not only that, but for four years the party leaders refused to even meet us.

In 1988, Arab Americans again played a leading role in the Jesse Jackson for President campaign. As part of that effort, I led the campaign to have Palestinian rights debated at the Democratic National Convention. It was at this time that I met Ron Brown. A Washington attorney and respected Democrat, he was asked by Reverend Jackson to manage the Jackson campaign's efforts at the Democratic convention.

The Democratic Party establishment was wary of Jackson's role and also deeply concerned that our determination to raise the issue of Palestinian rights would prove divisive to party unity. Some party leaders charged that if I persisted in my efforts to debate the Palestinian issue at the convention, I would bring disaster to the Democrats. But with Jackson's support, I succeeded in bringing the issue to the floor.

We had the first ever debate on Palestinian rights from the podium of the convention and the first ever floor demonstration in support of Palestinian statehood. Over 1,000 delegates carried signs reading "Palestine statehood now" and "Palestinian rights are the key to Middle East peace".

Some party leaders reacted with hostility and threatened to isolate me from party politics. My last two days at the convention were quite lonely and difficult.

As I was leaving the convention, two elderly African American men came to speak with me. One was Percy Sutton, a famed New York political leader and former attorney for Malcolm X. He embraced me, as did the other man, who I noted had tears in his eyes. Both men complimented me for my courage of conviction and my persistence and noted that they had experienced the same threats and isolation 40 years earlier when they had insisted on raising the issue of African American civil rights at the 1948 Democratic National Convention. They encouraged me to be strong with the knowledge that we would ultimately win.

The man with Percy was Ron Brown's father.

Ron stood by me during the convention. When Reverend Jackson nominated me to serve as one of his representatives to the Democratic National Committee (DNC) (the governing body of the party), Ron came to me with the news and discussed the pros and cons of the appointment. It was an honour, but he cautioned that it might not be the right time. I might be warned, become a lightning rod for opposition to Arab American inclusion in the Democratic Party, while the objective was to get an Arab American activist into the party leadership. And so I agreed that we should give the appointment to another Arab American.

In fact, Ron's advice was prophetic. One of the Republican Party's tactics in the 1988 Bush campaign was to use full-page newspaper ads demonising the Democratic Party for appointing a "pro-PLD" Arab American to the DNC. Ron defended the Arab-American member of the DNC and insisted that she remain in her post.

When Ron announced in December 1988 that he would run for chairman of the Democratic Party, I contributed to his campaign, as did other Arab Americans. While some told Ron to return the checks, he resisted and insisted that the party would be open to Arab Americans. In the end, Ron won and became the first African American to hold the position and become party chair.

I will never forget the day he took charge. He called me that morning from his office and invited me to come over. Knowing that Arab Americans had been denied a meeting at the DNC for four years, Ron wanted his first meeting as party chair to be with an Arab American. It was his signal that the exclusion of Arab Americans from US politics was a thing of the past.

During the next four years he made regular appearances at AAI conventions. While some hawkish Jewish American contributors threatened Ron with withdrawing their support from the party, Brown resisted the pressure and continued to support Arab American inclusion in the party.

Ron remained a close friend of the American Jewish community and a supporter of Israel, but he insisted that he was not an either-or situation: he could be friend with both American Jews and Arab Americans, and he was.

During the 1992 Clinton campaign, it was Ron Brown who campaigned in the Arab American community for the Democratic ticket and it was Ron Brown who fought for months to get Arab Americans a role in the Clinton-Gore campaign.

Following the 1992 campaign, Ron and Reverend Jackson and the new chair of the party all agreed to give me the appointment to the DNC that I had given up in 1988.

I was in Little Rock, Arkansas, on the day that it was announced that Ron would be secretary of commerce. We spoke on the phone and it was clear that he understood the role that the secretary of commerce could play in pursuit of a new foreign policy that viewed trade and economic development as the key to peace and stability in the post-Cold War world.

And so it was no surprise to me that we met in Washington shortly after his confirmation at the Department of Commerce to discuss how we could improve trade relations with the Arab world and to use economic development to strengthen the search for peace.

When Vice-President Al Gore asked me to assume the role as co-president of Builders for Peace, Ron Brown was one of my earliest and strongest supporters. He planned an early trip to the region and Arab Americans were brought into the planning. It was the first of many meetings that Arab American business people had at the Commerce Department. As he had opened the Democratic Party to Arab Americans, he also opened the Commerce Department to them.

Our first trip together to the West Bank and Gaza in January 1994 was highly significant. Ron was especially concerned to meet PLO Chairman Yasser Arafat and to be respectful of Palestinian concerns.

As a further example of his commitment to our community and to his deep sense of justice, he made an extraordinary effort to report on his trip to our AAI conference. He left the Middle East, flew non-stop to Andrews Airforce Base in Virginia and one hour later spoke to our Saturday night banquet.

"I left Cairo at 5:30 this morning Cairo time so that I could keep a commitment that I was determined to keep — to go to Gaza," he said. "I happen to think that it is very important for those of us who have positions of responsibility to demonstrate empathy, to reach out to people who have been oppressed, whose lives have been made miserable by their living conditions and to let them know that we care about them."

"I want to start saying some things about Arab Americans, who have sought to be listened to, respected, and for too long have been shut out. I made a special effort when I was chairman of the Democratic Party to never let that happen."

"[I met] Arab Americans before I left on this mission last Friday. That was to get some focus myself, to see what was important to the people most affected, to determine how I could do the most good and have the most impact. And I think we're beginning to have an impact. We're beginning to see change and that the struggle was worth it, and that the pain and the sacrifice and the hurt and the disillusionment and, in some cases, the cynicism that has now been overcome, were all worth it."

"I started a minute ago talking about Gaza because it had a real impact on me. I was in Soweto about six weeks ago and as an American of African descent it had a profound emotional impact. But I must say the situation in Gaza is much worse because not only is there abject poverty, but there is a kind of oppressive occupation presence that is just unacceptable. And being there brought home to me how absolutely essential it is to see this peace process move forward and to get to the day where the kind of — forget about the physical distress and the economic distress — emotional distress that you see on the faces of the people having to live under those conditions disappears. You wonder how they can survive. And I spent about three hours there yesterday and just riding in and seeing the potential: fertile soil, beautiful beaches, people with great energy and unbelievable endurance. It makes us know how important it is to make sure that this process is successful..."

"I see an area of the world that has been for too long ignored. And from my perspective as secretary of commerce, my principal focus is how we can create jobs so that people can take care of the basic needs of their families, and that is particularly the case in the West Bank and Gaza."

"No secretary of commerce from the United States had been to the Middle East in over 20 years... No cabinet official had been to Orient House until I went there three days ago. No cabinet official had been to Gaza until I went today. Because again I think you have to demonstrate by your presence, by seeing people face-to-face, by looking them in the eye, by shaking their hand, by putting your arms around them that you empathise, that they understand, that you care, that you are committed to making a difference."

Ron Brown returned from this trip on 7 April. On 8 April at 10:00, he and I met at the Commerce Department with a Palestinian-American businessman to discuss how to get a major American company to open a franchise in the West Bank.

The writer is president of the Washington-based Arab American Institute.

## Al-Ahram Weekly

### Back door diplomacy

For months, the sticking point in the peace negotiations between the Syrians and the Israelis has been the issue of establishing security points on the Golan. Syria has demanded that security provisions should be located on both sides of the border while Israel has asserted that it should be located only on the Syrian side of the border. It is, to say the least, an impasse.

However, Israel seems to have found a way around the matter. An accord has been reportedly signed between Turkey and Israel allowing each country's warplanes to fly through the other's air space and to use each other's air bases.

Not surprisingly, the response from the Arab world has been one of alarm. With the peace process on such tenuous footing, Israeli efforts to secure for itself another avenue to monitor its neighbours strikes a painful blow to the spirit of peace and cooperation to which Peres has repeatedly asserted his commitment.

If these reports on the accord are true, Israel now holds a northern route to Syria, essentially making the issue of security stations on the Golan a moot point. Moreover, it opens the way for a well-founded concern that Israel will use this pact to continue to attempt to manipulate and intimidate its neighbours.

If these reports prove to be exaggerated then Israel is still equally to blame for having instigated yet another panic that has fuelled the mounting concern over the future of the peace initiative. While it is, as of yet, unclear exactly what the terms of the agreement are, it is obvious that the Arab countries will not take this event lying down. It will be met, as Foreign Minister Amr Moussa noted, with "an equivalent response".

The tension in the region that will result from this accord will, more likely than not, be more potent than the spirit of peace—or, at least Israel's commitment to the spirit of peace. For the Israelis and the Syrians to push aside the decades-long animosity, a measure of trust and mutual confidence must be the foundation of peace. However, with the passage of each new day, Peres seems determined to undermine the aim of the negotiations. How much longer will Israel stand in the open and affirm its commitment to peace while seeking a back door into the Arab world?

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# Development, the liberal way (1)

Democracy in the political realm is the counterpart of the free market in the economy — each a necessary condition for the other, argues **Said El-Naggar** in the first of a two part study of democracy and development

The interaction between changes in any country's economic system and changes in its political system has recently become a major development issue. This question was of little concern to mainstream economics until very recently. It was always assumed that development is primarily, if not exclusively, a function of purely economic factors: savings, investment, factor productivity, macroeconomic stability and the like.

To be sure, passing reference was occasionally made to non-economic factors, but such reference was often an afterthought. Yet we know by observation and experience that development may be thwarted not by faulty economic policies, but by the political framework within which economic decisions are made. Not infrequently, economic development is defeated by public officials' lack of accountability, absence of rotation of political power, rampant corruption and flagrant human rights violations. In consequence, international development institutions are beginning to pay attention to governance as one of the determinants of the success or failure of reform programmes. This trend is even more evident in the case of bilateral sources of aid where democracy and respect for human rights have in many cases become conditions for the continuation of economic assistance.

At a more general level, it is not difficult to see the interaction between changes in the economic and political systems. In some instances, the structure of the economic system excludes the possibility of liberal democracy. If the economic system does not recognise private ownership in the means of production and does not condone private enterprise, there is no possibility for any political system except a totalitarian one. Concentration of economic power in the hands of the state leads by necessity to concentration of political power.

Schumpeter was wrong insofar as he is interpreted to have maintained that socialism, in the Marxist sense, is not inconsistent with democracy. It is a contradiction in terms to call for the dictatorship of the proletariat and at the same time profess support for democracy. Of course democracy can be defined in such a way as to be different from liberal democracy. This is the case of so-called economic democracy, where political rights of the individual are denied on the basis of the spurious argument that this is the price society must pay to ensure bread and job security for the masses. The same can be said of so-called democratic centralism, a euphemism for dictatorship under a one-party system.

It is not necessary, however, to go so far as state ownership of the means of production in order to exclude liberal democracy. In many developing countries, a democratic system of government is effectively undermined by the fact that public enterprises account for a very high proportion of economic activity. If a substantial percentage of the labour force is employed by the government and the business public sector, it is difficult to imagine an electorate which is sufficiently independent to support a liberal democracy. A huge business public sector is likely to go hand in hand with an authoritarian system of government.

By the same token, it can be argued that the dispersion of economic power through the institution of private ownership and private enterprise is normally associated with, or eventually leads to, the dispersion of political power. There is of course no inevitable link between democracy and an economic system based on private ownership and enterprise. In the majority of cases, the mere existence of a capitalist system has been no guarantee against the rise of political dictatorship. But it certainly has been a necessary condition for a democratic system of government.

The history of Western Europe provides a case in point. The rise of liberal democracy was the natural result of long-term changes in the economic system which saw the end of feudalism and the emergence of a strong middle class supported by privately owned commercial and industrial enterprises. In fact, it is possible to argue that liberal democracy is the political equivalent of a market-based economic system. Under both systems, power resides in the popular base rather than at the top. In the market system

power is wielded by the mass of consumers; in liberal democracy, it is exercised by the mass of the people.

The experience of developing countries during the period following the second world war yields some important lessons on the interaction between economic and political systems. According to the conventional wisdom prevailing in the newly independent countries, development, modernisation and industrialisation could not take place on the basis of market forces, private enterprise, privatisation and consumer sovereignty. It was maintained that such a system works in already developed countries. As for developing countries, the argument went, a different kind of approach is required. According to this view, markets in developing countries are imperfect as well as fragmented; entrepreneurs are typically unresponsive to the profit motive, and economic resources lack the necessary degree of mobility. Under these conditions, the neo-classical theory of development, it was argued, would be a poor guide for policy.

According to the development paradigm which was adopted in most of the developing countries, modernisation and industrialisation could only be achieved by decisions made at the top. These decisions were spelled out in a plan under which responsibility for development falls almost exclusively upon the government. Only the government, it was maintained, could mobilise resources, appropriate economic surplus for investment in productive activities, integrate the national market, overcome bottlenecks and obstacles impeding development and, more generally, force the economic and social system to move in the direction of modernisation and industrialisation.

More telling was the fact that the development process was portrayed as a sort of military operation in which the army of planners confronts the forces of backwardness and underdevelopment. Concepts and terminologies were borrowed from the military lexicon to describe a phenomenon which was essentially economic in nature. In the context of economic development, it was common to come across expressions such as "control of the commanding heights of the economy" which turned out to be euphemisms for the takeover by the state of basic industries, the banking system, mining activities and practically all public utilities. It was also common to speak of the strategy and tactics of development, and of advancing along this or that axis.

Such an approach to the development process has had far-reaching implications, both economically and politically. On the economic side, it led to the adoption of an interventionist model of development, what Professor Deepak Lal calls the dirigiste model, of which the basic characteristics are a huge public sector, planning as a means of allocating resources, suppression of private enterprise and extensive regulation of the economy. In most cases, the model has strong socialist, if not Marxist, overtones. For all practical purposes, it amounted to an outright rejection of the neo-classical model.

On the political side, the dirigiste model gave rise to systems of government which were often despotic. The basic feature was the predominance of a one-party system, open control by the military or a combination of the two. It is not difficult to see the interaction between the economic and the political paradigms. The absence of consumers' choice on the economic side paved the way for the absence of people's choice on the political side. The sovereignty of the people, which is the essence of democracy, was replaced by the sovereignty of the planners, which defines the dirigiste model.

The dirigiste model on the economic side combined with the absence of democracy on the political side might have been tolerated had they resulted in a significant improve-

ment in general economic welfare. In fact, the model has been anything but a success. In the vast majority of cases, it has failed in achieving any of its declared objectives. The rate of growth of GDP was not adequate to bring about material improvement in the standard of living. Poverty on a massive scale remained as crushing as, if not worse than, it was under the colonial system. No less significant was the fact that most of the countries which espoused the dirigiste authoritarian paradigm ended up suffering from high rates of unemployment, runaway inflation and severe external indebtedness. Corruption became endemic and political power was used not to overcome bottlenecks and integrate markets, as claimed, but to enrich those at the pinnacle of the system.

It is now almost five years since the Egyptian government embarked on a comprehensive reform programme supported by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. The programme consists of two distinct parts. The macroeconomics agreement concluded with the IMF is designed to reduce basic monetary and fiscal imbalances. The other part, supported by the World Bank, deals with the real economy and aims at eliminating structural distortions.

It is gratifying to note that substantial progress has been realised under the macroeconomics part of the programme. The last few years saw a marked slowdown in the rate of inflation, a striking stability in exchange rates, and significant improvement in budgetary and balance of payments deficits. No less important is a substantial reduction in external indebtedness and a considerable build-up in monetary reserves. This is indeed a remarkable achievement considering that it was realised within a short span of time.

With respect to the structural adjustment part of the programme, some important steps have been taken by the government in the implementation of ERSAP-I, i.e. the first stage of the Economic Reform and Structural Adjustment Programme. These steps include measures designed to raise the efficiency of the public sector, laying the foundation of the privatisation programme, bringing to the point of sale, or actually selling, some public sector companies, liberalising the foreign trade regime, aligning energy prices with international prices, decontrolling prices of a wide range of industrial and agricultural products, reforming the tax system and activating the capital market.

In spite of these efforts, it is fair to say that structural adjustment has been moving at a slower pace than programmed and much slower than what is necessary to maintain the momentum of reform. In fact one cannot fail to notice the contrast between the speed and smoothness with which reform of the money economy has proceeded and the hesitation and delay that have characterised reform of the real economy. The reasons for this contrast are not difficult to identify and they are probably as valid for Egypt as they are for other countries undergoing the same experience.

In the first place, reform of the real economy is far more complex and much more time-consuming than reform of the money economy. Structural distortions were built into the system over a long period of time. It is perhaps too optimistic to expect them to disappear within a short period of time. Secondly, the global context in which the reform programme is being carried out is far from favourable. There is little doubt that reform is best and most easily executed within the framework of a buoyant world economy. In this case, however, the implementation period of structural adjustment has coincided with a deep and protracted global recession, a substantial decline in the price of oil (a major export item) and, last but not least, the loss of important export markets. fol-

lowing the collapse of the Soviet Union and economic disarray in the East European countries.

While these factors offer a partial explanation of the delay in carrying out the structural adjustment programme, political factors would also seem to play a major role. Of special importance in this context is opposition by strongly entrenched vested interests who see their position threatened by the proposed reform programme.

By its very nature, structural adjustment has winners and losers. Winners are those who are likely to benefit from the changes brought about by reform. Losers include those who derive substantial benefits — legitimate or illegitimate — from the status quo. In most cases, losers are easily identifiable, more vocal and can be readily organised. Consequently, they are in a position to bring their weight to bear on the decision-making. In contrast, winners are only so in a potential, not actual sense. They are neither identifiable nor sufficiently organised to exert systematic pressure in favour of reform. Reference may be made to the privatisation programme as a case in point.

Losers include managers and high-level functionaries of public enterprises. They are likely to look at privatisation as a sure way of losing their jobs. The same is true of trade union leaders who derive substantial benefits, material and otherwise, from the public sector. Fear of unemployment when the enterprise passes to the private sector underlies the negative attitude towards privatisation on the part of a good portion of the labour force. All these categories are singularly cool towards the privatisation programme; at the same time, they are well placed to make their views felt by the political system. Potential winners, on the other hand, include the public at large, who would benefit from doing away with an inefficient and corrupt public sector. But they are widely spread throughout the economy, visualise their interest in privatisation only dimly, if at all, and lack the organisation to speak in one voice in favour of reform.

Another case in point is trade liberalisation. Prior to the implementation of the economic reform programme, the foreign trade regime was characterised by an excessively high degree of protection. Consequently, the local market was for all practical purposes shielded against foreign competition. The system was highly wasteful and has led to the establishment of industries which stand no chance of survival in a less protected market.

Economic reform meant that a total ban on imports was impossible, barring health or security reasons, that non-tariff barriers would be replaced by tariff barriers, and that the level of tariff protection would be moderated. It does not take long to realise that such reform is deeply resented by local producers who have long been accustomed to a level of protection that spared them the pain and discipline of foreign competition. Here again, those who are opposed to reform are far more vocal than the general public who stand to benefit from trade liberalisation in terms of greater efficiency and lower prices.

The question arises as to the best way of overcoming opposition to reform on sectoral or sectional grounds. There are reasons to believe that in the Egyptian context greater measures of democratisation may well be the most effective way of dealing with this kind of opposition. It could serve to break up unholy alliances in the present political set-up. No less important is the fact that a greater measure of democratisation would probably bring to power a government with a clear-cut mandate to implement the economic reform programme.

In this respect, reference may be made to the example of Turkey in the early eighties. Turgut Ozal campaigned on a platform of liberalisation, privatisation and deregulation of the economy. When his party won the election, he was sufficiently strong to turn around the Turkish economy in the direction of comprehensive reform. Should a greater measure of democratisation fail to produce a clear-cut mandate for reform, the situation would not be much different from what it is at the present time.

The writer is a professor of economics and head of the New Civic Forum.

## Al-Ahram and I

By Naguib Mahfouz

Since my eyesight failed, I have had to read through the eyes of others. These past few years, my old friend from Al-Ahram, Hagg Sabri, has come to visit me every morning, and read me the newspapers for two or three hours. We usually start with Al-Ahram, and sometimes have no time to go through the other papers. But Al-Ahram has had a special place in my heart since my childhood, not a day has passed without my reading it. When I was appointed to write for Al-Ahram in 1959, it was one of the greatest moments of my life.

It is not true, as the *Wall Street Journal* recently claimed, that I only read the obituaries in Al-Ahram. The oldest newspaper in the Arab world, Al-Ahram contributed to moulding my nature. It accurately reflects all the different views on the political and cultural scene in Egypt. It causes me great sorrow that I can now only enjoy it for a couple of hours every morning, when in fact it requires seven hours' solid reading — the time I used to spend perusing its pages. I usually begin with the front page, for the news of the day, then skim through the back page before moving on to the opinion pages and reading the columns thoroughly. Then I look at the reports on topics of concern.

Friday is Hagg Sabri's holiday, so I wait until one of my daughters wakes up and reads me Ibrahim Nafie's weekly column. His deep insight helps me understand the patterns in the course of events and their implications. Unfortunately, the rest of the Friday edition — the literature, culture and thought it contains — remains inaccessible, except through friends who keep me informed.

Based on an interview by Mohamed Salmany.

## Close up

Salama A. Salama

### The rules of the game

The world today is a very different place from what it was in the seventies and eighties. Exchange and competition, and real struggles no longer take place between governments or at the national level, but between transnational corporations, individual magnates and huge investment conglomerates. Brigades of men in chic black business suits roam the world. They speak in numbers and statistics, keep abreast of the most recent political, economic and financial developments and shift trillions across continents with quick, tightly binding agreements.

The rules of the game have changed now. The big decisions are no longer taken by the Security Council or the United Nations, nor are they hammered out at foreign ministers' meetings; they are taken at businessmen's conferences. Cooperation agreements are clinched between huge firms, and large-scale investment projects are carried out by multinational corporations.

Governments now have different tasks: they organise, smooth over legislative, political and diplomatic complications, open up international channels of cooperation, and encourage the smaller, weaker nations, which possess vast resources but poor administration and investment capabilities, to host delegations of companies and experts from around the world. Then begins the process of exploitation, development and extraction: huge profits are made under the table. Entire systems of training, management and project financing have become the newest, most widespread commodity available on the global market.

At the Globe '96 Exhibition held in Vancouver, every detail of this new picture became clear to me. Official government organisations were out of focus, in the background, commenting only when their assistance was required. Thousands of businessmen and investment company representatives buzzed about incessantly like bees in a hive, backed up by armies of experts and technocrats specialised in the sale of advanced technologies which solve complicated environmental problems, and new technologies adapted to the particular needs of the participants' respective countries.

The real struggle today seems to be taking place between the advanced industrialised countries, on one hand, and the Asian tigers, on the other. The latter speak modernism when wheeling and dealing, marketing, selling and buying. They exert enormous efforts in transforming prohibitively expensive Western technology into cheap commodities accessible to the low-income countries left behind in the technology race.

Of the Arab countries, only Egypt and Tunisia attended this international forum on environmental technology, even their participation was very limited. The delegates from China, India, Indonesia, Singapore, Malaysia, South Korea and Vietnam, on the other hand, were all very interested in presenting and promoting the successes they had achieved in the field. At these international meetings, the Chinese delegates are conscious of belonging to one of the powerful nations. They gather the most minute details and visit all the exhibits. We are not paying sufficient attention to what is one of the most momentous phenomena taking place today: the transfer of technology. The Chinese, on the other hand, are busy negotiating deals with the utmost skill, whether in order to purchase new technologies or to transfer them by other means — in other words, to steal them.

It is hardly strange, therefore, that the aircraft carrying the American Minister of Commerce to Dubrovnik also bore a delegation of the most powerful businessmen and chairmen of US corporations. They had best their European competitors in the race to reap the fruits of the American-sponsored peace deal in the Balkans. Today, the name of the game seems to be signing business deals. Talking politics takes place after hours.



Comaqla?

## Soapbox

### Nuclear nightmare

While the US bats not an eyelid at Israel's nuclear arsenal, and is perfectly willing to condone Israel's refusal to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, other Middle Eastern countries are treated in a very different manner. There is a blatant double standard when it comes to the treatment of Israel and its neighbours and nowhere is this more apparent than in the treatment accorded to Iraq and Libya. On the suspicion of possessing chemical weapons threats of military intervention are issued.

Reports about a new strategic pact between Israel and the US serve only to compound a situation that is increasingly intolerable, and that is making a mockery of the entire peace process. Peace, after all, is meaningless, unless it guarantees the security of all parties in the region.

How can there be peace when the entire region is in thrall to Israel's nuclear capabilities? Israel's nuclear arsenal, indeed, constitutes nothing less than terrorism. It is the means by which Israel seeks to blackmail all the peoples of the region. If peace cannot survive in an atmosphere of violence and conventional terrorism, be it Palestinian or Israeli, how much less can it survive under the threat of Israeli nuclear terrorism.

Egypt has always taken a firm stance vis-à-vis nuclear threats; it is a stance that stems from a long-sighted view of the possible repercussions such a threat can pose. Nobody can deny the incompatibility between the existence of a nuclear threat on the one hand, and demands for security on the other.

The recent news leaked by Israeli TV about the burial of radioactive waste in the Negev Desert is a cause for great concern. No matter how much Israel and the US deny or try to brush over this news, the fact remains that the continuation of Israel's nuclear activities poses an enormous threat to the security of the region and its peoples.

This week's Soapbox speaker is a retired major general and former assistant to the foreign minister.



Taha El-Magdoub

# The poor logic of poverty

Certain structural adjustment experts, writes Galal Amin, in response to an article by Mohamed El-Erian, quite remind one of Voltaire: they, like him, know that it is possible to kill a flock of sheep with witchcraft, as long as plenty of arsenic is used as well

Whenever you ask an International Monetary Fund (IMF) or a World Bank expert to comment on the widely-expressed fear that their stabilisation and structural adjustment programmes will cause great suffering to the poor, their usual response amounts to little more than this: the fate of the poor is ultimately bound to the fate of the growth rate of the economy as a whole, and this rate of growth cannot rise without stabilisation policies and structural adjustment. It follows that these two programmes, though not a sufficient condition for improving the lot of the poor, are a necessary condition. Any harm that could befall the poor as a result of these measures is therefore only a "short term" phenomenon which must be tolerated. In the long run, growth rates must rise and with them, the state of the poor must improve.

In these experts' view, anything you might say about the impact of these two programmes on the poor is an almost complete waste of time. "You are afraid that cutting government expenditure to reduce the budget deficit will take place at the expense of subsidies on education and health services or essential foodstuffs? Do not worry, this is only the short term effect of reform which will last only until the rate of inflation is reduced." Will not liberalisation of trade and privatisation lead to rising unemployment? "Yes, but only until greater investment creates new employment opportunities." Will not devaluation cause the prices of essential imports to rise? "Yes, but everything will be all right again when your exports start to respond", etc.

If you insist that all these causes of suffering to the poor should be faced and dealt with, they have really only one answer: "Do you want to sacrifice growth? Do you want to sacrifice the country's economic future for ever for the sake of short-term benefits to the poor?"

I have always felt uncomfortable with this way of arguing. I find it both lacking in logic and based on a very partial and biased reading of economic history.

As for logic, it seems to me to present the issue falsely as a matter of choice between growth or no growth, while it is (at worst) a choice between higher or lower growth rates. Of course, if there is no growth at all, the poor (as well as the rich) must suffer in the long run. But those who are advocating

that some concern should be shown for the interests of the poor are not advocating zero growth rates. They are only willing to accept a lower growth rate so long as its fruits are more widely distributed. One may very well prefer a lower but "decent" growth rate to higher rates from which only the already rich (or foreign investors) realise any benefit.

But there is also ample historical evidence that growth rates may not suffer at all as a result of better distribution, while the IMF and the World Bank rarely quote and never emphasise this very real possibility.

But from where do they derive such confidence that the poor must ultimately benefit from growth, and that their sufferings are only short term? It is derived largely from the famous trickle-down theory. This theory, however, is based on the well-known findings of S. Kuznets' study of Western experience — hardly a source of comfort for most Third World countries today.

Economic growth in the West, during the last century and the first half of this century, was associated with many things that brought great benefits to the poor, but there is no guarantee that this experience can be repeated in our own countries, either in the short or in the long run. Strong trade unions as well as colonialism were responsible for much of the trickling down, much more than economic growth per se, so that Third World countries which have neither strong trade unions nor colonies could wait very much longer before any trickling down takes place — if it ever does. Moreover, the experience of the Western countries themselves during the past twenty years shows that the trickle-down trend can easily be reversed, and growth can very well be accompanied by worsening distribution and increasing poverty.

This emphasis on economic growth constituted the main message of a paper submitted to a recent symposium on "The Social Impact of Economic Reforms in Arab Countries" organised in Abu Dhabi by the Arab Monetary Fund and the Arab Fund for Economic and Social Development. The paper I am referring to was written by two IMF experts: Mohamed El-Erian, deputy director of the Middle Eastern Department in the IMF, and Patricia Alonso-Gamo. But this is again the main message of Dr El-Erian's recent article published in *Al-Ahram Weekly* (28 March, 1996), entitled: "Choosing a win-win

option" and partly prompted by an article of mine published in the same paper, "Shrouded in a safety net" (7 March, 1996).

As is usual with recent IMF and World Bank literature, whatever subject is tackled, even if it is the impact of their policies on the poor, the occasion is turned into a new celebration for promoting economic liberalisation and less government intervention. For the sake of this promotion, half truths and tautologies are abundantly used, but are usually forgiven, or even pass unnoticed by a largely sympathetic audience, confident that it is all for a good cause.

To give one illustration from the original paper submitted to the Abu Dhabi symposium, the authors allege that "developing countries that have followed export promotion strategies (and have thus been able to benefit from a shift in trade and production towards labour-intensive goods) have generally registered increases in real wages and more equitable income distribution." This statement may be true as a description of some empirical findings, which may not be as general as the phrase "generally registered" may imply. But more importantly, it would surely be wrong to take this as grounds for advocating trade liberalisation as a means of achieving greater equity, as the authors were obviously trying to do. For one thing, export promotion may rely on exporting "more labour intensive goods", but these may be more labour intensive than what would have been produced in the exporting country itself had production been mainly for the home market. Moreover, trade liberalisation is not only export promotion but also includes the liberalisation of imports, and import liberalisation could have detrimental effects on income distribution if it leads, for example, to the decline of domestic industries competing with imports. The authors of this paper seem to have felt that the statement was perhaps too sweeping, so they added: "Openers must therefore be accompanied by other policy aimed at increased opportunities for the poor." This amounts to saying that trade liberalisation is a good thing for the poor, provided that something else is done at the same time to help the poor. This statement reminds one of Voltaire's satirical remark that it is possible to kill a flock of sheep with witchcraft, provided you give them plenty of arsenic at the same

time! Now, in his recent article (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, March 28) Dr El-Erian seems to have done it again by concluding that "international experience confirms that with a proper mix and sequencing of policies, supported by properly targeted social safety net provisions and institution strengthening, the region can decisively improve its growth, employment and social sector performance". This, properly read, is saying really no more than that, if the reform measures are associated with measures to protect the poor, the poor will certainly be protected! (Does one need to consult "international experience" or indeed, anything else, to be sure of this?)

In my article "Shrouded in a Safety Net", I pointed out that what social funds spend on the poor is so small that the reallocation of a very small part of total investment towards the poor would make such funds redundant. While I admitted that "there is no reason to object to acts of charity in principle", such as that performed by Egypt's Social Fund, "one is more than entitled to be sceptical if such charity is performed simply in order to divert attention from other duties that should be, but are not performed" — namely to reallocate investment in such a way as to reach those who are really in need. The only response this gets in Dr El-Erian's article is this: "Of course, such a system (i.e. the social safety net system) cannot and should not be expected to substitute for investments in human and physical assets... It is, and can only be one of a range of measures directed toward helping the poor." But what if one observes that such social funds can be, and in fact are, used as substitutes for an allocation of investment that could have benefited the poor much more? What if the international financial institutions, while encouraging the establishment of such social funds, consistently turn a blind eye to an unjust and highly biased allocation of investment towards the already rich, and proclaim government policy a success on the basis of how much it goes for stabilisation and structural adjustment and "safety nets", irrespective of whether the poor are or are not taken care of?

Only one of the points I raised seems to have caused the author to change his position slightly, though without admitting that such a change had taken place. In my article I had lamented the fact that the authors' orig-

inal paper alleged that the social indicators in Arab countries were "relatively favourable in aggregate" and I produced some figures to show that, at least in Egypt, the situation with regard to nutrition, education and health, over the last 15 years, has been pretty bad. (These 15 years, incidentally, happen to be the years during which the Egyptian government has been much more ready to take IMF and World Bank advice than ever before). In his recent article, Dr El-Erian describes the development of the social indicators a little differently. Now, "in aggregate, they may compare relatively favourably with other regions in terms of traditional social indicators", he adds "economic and social sector performance in recent years has been below potential. Low economic growth rates have added to employment problems in certain countries..." Thus, the author is now willing to admit that the social indicators are "below potential", but this is hardly comforting. We tell them that the poor are getting a very tough deal in food consumption, education and health and the answer comes "Yes, yes, these services are 'below potential'." But such a phrase could be used to describe the most advanced systems of social services in the world, since these are also "below potential". The author, however, is not even content with this; he quickly puts the blame for failing to reach full potential on low growth rates! Thus, on one can be responsible for the plight of the poor except low growth rates, and nothing should be done to help the poor except to raise the rate of growth.

While the IMF authors usually express themselves with the utmost confidence and greatest authority, in at least one respect they are willing to express humility. They, like their World Bank colleagues, are always careful to point out, at the beginning or the end of their papers, that "the views expressed in this paper do not necessarily reflect those of the IMF". I take this to mean that all of us, being ordinary mortals, can make mistakes, even if we happen to be working for the IMF or the World Bank, but by no means should these mistakes be attributed to the Great Institution itself. We are not God, our function is simply to interpret His will as best we can.

The writer is a professor of economics at the American University in Cairo.

## To The Editor

### The blood boils

Sir: I would like to comment on the article entitled "Steeped in ignorance" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 21-27 March), which read: "Not a day passes when African Americans in the US are not confronted with some expression or manifestation of white racism."

I certainly have not experienced that and my African American blood begins to boil at the very thought of such a statement! On what authority did DuBois establish himself to concoct such a rash, absurd concept? Surely America is not a perfect society and is full of ethnic problems, but do you know of an utopian society this side of heaven?

I was part of the nationwide civil rights movement in the 1960s, and I can say that there has been a vast improvement in the education level, including black studies programmes and departments. True, these changes were developed quickly, and just as a small drop of rain, joined by other drops will be able to fill brooks, streams, rivers and oceans. Time will only reveal the impact of the efforts of many to revise and reconstruct the American educational system concerning its multiculturalism curriculums. Sabr gamill! (Patience is beautiful!).

R. Chance  
Mohandessin

The article "Steeped in ignorance" was written by David DuBois, an African American scholar.

The Editor

### A humane compromise

Sir: Even though I have been aware of your newspaper's fine reputation for some time, only very recently have I had the opportunity to read it on a regular basis. Besides its openness to different schools of thought, *Al-Ahram Weekly* strikes the reader with the honesty, depth and clarity of each and every one of its articles. This alone would be enough to distinguish your paper internationally.

However, there are indeed other reasons behind the *Weekly's* steady success. In my unassuming conviction

they embody, for any issue at stake, the rather singular concern of your staff to uncover the truth, comment upon different alternatives, and define a humane and balanced compromise which best serves the community at large.

In my capacity as one of your readers, I would like to congratulate all who contribute to maintaining the *Weekly* as one of the finest newspapers in the world. Osvaldo J.R. Sales  
Umlanga Rocks  
South Africa

### Cultural invasion

Sir: I read with interest the profile of Saad Labib (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 21-27 March). I entirely agree with him that "there must be a total reform of the education system, not just patching up here and there." Only through education can we secure a place for us in the coming century.

However, I don't at all agree with Mr Labib regarding his assertion that there is no harm in what is called "cultural invasion" which is mainly brought about by direct TV transmission through satellites. I do believe that we haven't yet reached the required state of maturity that enables us to be selective, eclectic and discriminating.

It is a fine idea indeed to get in touch with other cultures, but undermining our value system and losing our own identity will be too high a price to pay.

I'd like here to quote the Mahatma Gandhi who rightly said, "I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any."

Essam Hanna Wahba  
Salam Language School  
Assiut

### Peace or parity

Sir: The recent reports of possible radioactive leakage from Israel's Dimona reactor drew the world's atten-

tion to the seriousness of the danger posed by the Israeli nuclear programme.

On the other hand, Egypt, as Ahmed El Qadi, the head of the National Centre for Nuclear Safety and Radioactive Control said "is well equipped with a wide-scale radioactive detection network, with 48 stations monitoring any leakage in the air, water or soil along the country's borders." But he warned also that we couldn't stop nuclear disaster taking place as long as we have no information about this nuclear facility.

President Mubarak has reiterated that the Middle East should be a nuclear-free zone so that peace will prevail in the region. Failing this, the Arabs' long-term strategy should aim at achieving military parity with Israel, which continues to refuse to sign the NPT. Ashraf Faragallah Saad  
English Language Teacher  
Beni Suef

### Together in virtue

Sir: With reference to the article entitled "Liberal Muffi to head Al-Azhar" (*Al-Ahram Weekly*, 28 March - 3 April), Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi noted that his plan for the future is serving the public interest and the homeland. The service necessitates disseminating true values, culture and knowledge.

No doubt, Sheikh Tantawi is the appropriate choice as he is well qualified for the task. Much is expected from this liberal scholar who is in favour of change and broadmindedness. It is greatly appreciated that as an authority, he has this vision.

Bringing all Egyptians together in the pursuit of virtue is his main concern. He is a man of ideals famous for his tolerant nature. More than once, he referred to the importance of civil unions. His appointment is the start of new era that will witness enlightenment, paving the way for liberalism to flourish. The appointment is the dream that has come true.

Zarif Kamel Hakim  
English language teacher  
El-Daher Secondary School for Girls

## Reflections

### By the rivers of Babylon

By Hani Shukrallah

Peres and Clinton, with the help of their respective legislatures and media, have finally deconstructed the "peace process". Whatever happens now — whether final status negotiations are resumed after the May/June Israeli elections; whether Peres and Labour are returned to power, or are replaced by Netanyahu and Likud; whether the "final status" negotiations merely confirm the banishment of the "territories" or lead to a banishment-like Palestinian statelet — the logic of Middle East peace has been laid bare. It is, and has been from the start, a conquerors' peace. The Arabs, and most especially the Palestinians, are captives of the American-Israeli strategic alliance, of Israeli nuclear weapons, of each and every punitive whim that may take the powers that be in Washington, for electoral, or any other reasons, of the IDF, the Mossad, the armed settlers and the regularly "outraged" Israeli public.

There is no way that the Palestinians can have a sovereign state of their own: they cannot have control over their land, water, economy, foreign policy, neither now nor in their "final status". They can have no real borders; their "territories" are, and will remain, intersected with Israeli-controlled settlements and roads and check-points. The most they can hope for is a federated "Benelux" with Israel and Jordan.

But, while they have on borders to control, open, close, or — God forbid — defend, their borders can be closed on them. While they can have no independent economy, they can be denied even their subservience to the Israeli economy. They cannot de-link with Israel, but they can be de-linked to starvation.

Meanwhile, Israel can "execute" Palestinian "terrorists" at will, bomb Lebanese villagers, destroy houses, take hostages, detain and torture suspects in the Territories and outside. And, of course, if need be — and no Israeli official has had the slightest qualm about asserting this — the army can move back in, whenever Israel deems fit. The Palestinians in the Territories are a captive population; Oslo is the Palestinians' Babylon.

Above: A scene from *Highland or The Echo of the Stones*; below: Joachim Schlömer

## Poetry of paradox

Our National Theatre is celebrating its 60th birthday this year. In a warm and generous gesture, the Goethe Institute in Cairo has decided to honour the occasion and present an Egyptian theatre-lover with the rare opportunity of enjoying a production by one of the most talented and interesting choreographers of the younger generation in Europe today. Joachim Schlömer may be only 33 (he was born in Mönchen, near Cologne in 1962), but he has already made his mark on the European choreography scene and won a prestigious reputation. Significantly, too, the visiting production comes from The German National Theatre of Weimar, one of the oldest and most important theatres in Germany. Founded in 1791 as the "Court Theatre" of Karl August, the famous Grand-Duke of Weimar, it was headed from its foundation until 1817 by no less figure than the great Goethe himself, and it was there that most of his major plays, together with those of his contemporary Friedrich Schiller premiered.

**Nehad Selaiha**  
soars into  
the regions  
of poetry  
with  
Schlömer's  
*Highland*



At the press conference, last Thursday at the National, many were surprised by the extremely youthful appearance of Herr Schlömer and could not recollect if with the resumé that had read of his rich and varied artistic career or with his postcard as director and choreographer of the dance theatre at the German National Theatre of Weimar. In Egypt, we are not used to young people wielding authority or holding high managerial posts in the theatre or elsewhere. The National Theatre of Weimar, however, seems to follow a policy of constant rejuvenation through young talent, and the work we saw last Friday proves the wisdom of this policy.

To reach his postcard at the head of one of the four major companies of the National Theatre of Weimar, Herr Schlömer had to travel a long and jagged way. After completing his secondary education, he studied dance and choreography with Hans Zullig, Malou Airaud and Jean Cebro at the Folkwang School in Essen. During that period too — between 1984 and 1988 — he cultivated other fields of interest including folklore, flamenco and historical dance. He toured eastern Europe in 1987, dancing *Le Sacre du Printemps* with Pina Bausch's Wuppertal Dance Theatre, then joined the Mark Morris Monnaie Dance Group at the Theatre de la Monnaie in Brussels where he remained until 1991. But already, as early as 1984, this talented young artist was choreographing group works for his own dance troupe (Company Josch) together with stage and costume designer Frank Leimbach. His first directorial post came in 1991 when he became director of ballet at the City Theatre in Ulm. Three years later, in the autumn of 1994, he moved with his ensemble to the National Theatre in Weimar where he is stationed now, but not for long. Next year will find him

with many of his long time dance colleagues in Basel. Outside Germany, Schlömer worked with a number of ensembles, including the Ballet Royal de Wallonie in Charleroi, where he choreographed *La Mer En Deux Etages* in 1993, and Mikhail Baryshnikov's White Oak Dance Project for which he choreographed *Blue Heron* in 1993, then *Beyond White Lies* in the following year.

Schlömer has already 40 dance works to his credit (he describes them as "choreographies"), and his latest creation, *Highland or The Echo of the Stones* (Hochland oder Der Nachhall der Steine), which he brought to Cairo is a work of real beauty which combines geometrical rigour with lyrical tenderness. Transposing a work of art from one cultural context into another is usually a risky business; in the case of all dance theatre, however, the risk is lessened by the universal language of movement. Besides, thanks to the Cairo International Festival for Experimental Theatre, Egyptian audiences have been repeatedly exposed to the latest trends in Western theatre and have consequently developed a substantial measure of reception tolerance. Nevertheless, for many, Schlömer's *Highland* proved baffling simply because it lacked a narrative framework and demanded the active engagement of the viewer in constructing the "meaning" of the work.

Schlömer's creative mode is essentially poetic, not mimetic; he uses movement and the bodies of his dancers to structure space into a series of evocative images and powerful metaphors that cannot be conceptualised in words. Rather than "express", the movement "evokes" and the audio-visual impact is tremendous. Through a carefully orchestrated series of paradoxes and contrasts, unfolding in a rich variety of rhythms, including the rhythms of stillness and silence, the work projects a symphony of moods, feelings and states of being — the rich landscapes of a sensitive mind in its complex, poetic response to life and death. The music which "embraces" (rather than "accompanies") the visual formation, and which combines tradition Scottish pipes music with Renaissance and Baroque music as well as original compositions, or "sound-scapes", by Michael von Hintzenstein and Hans Tuschku, contributes vastly, in harmony with the lighting, to the poetic energy of the work. Here, the soundtrack carries us to the hills of Scotland, to the sea, to the carnival and the market-place, then plunges us into the demonic din of the big city with its roaring traffic before it sends us into the past on the waves of music. But wherever it carries us, and even under the harsh, ruthless glare of the big neon lights, we never lose touch with the magic of poetry. *Highland* may be a difficult and baffling piece, but it makes up for this in terms of beauty and imaginative impact.

### Music

## Brahms or bust

**David Blake goes**  
from Italy to hell

Cairo Symphony Orchestra; Great Symphonies (7); Tchaikovsky, Italian Capriccio opus 45; Sergei Rachmaninov, Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, piano and orchestra, opus 43, piano solo Eric Himy; Brahms Symphony no 3 F major, opus 90; conductor, Ahmed El-Saedi. Cairo Opera House, Main Hall, 30 March

A highly coloured concert opening with a full brass fanfare well and accurately played. The Tchaikovsky *Italian Capriccio* sounded more Spanish than Italian. It was positively flamenco. But the scene was set for the waves of varied sound that were to come during the rest of the programme. The hieratic, formal and military folk-like tune blared out proud and primitive. It was commanding but the Tchaikovsky personality is hardly ever care-free or relaxed. El-Saedi encouraged the orchestra to make something threatening and rather aggressive — dark splashes opened to give silvery lightning-blades of sound. It was very visual and Goya-like: a northern dream of Italy. The reflection of a meridional world in an icy mirror. It was exciting, drawing aside an ornate curtain on the next music, the well-worn *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini* by Rachmaninov — a gorgeous, almost oriental carpet at both ends with the big popular tune in the middle.

Rachmaninov had a tear in his music that goes far beyond the stream of emotions that pour from the Danube, far below the Volga. Rachmaninov's nostalgia was deep and passionate and tied to that period of Russian history in which he lived his early life. Russia then was the great Northern mystery. The immense reaching that was the revolution severed all connections with twentieth century influence. Rachmaninov remained pre-1917.

Blood and disorientation passed through his music like stains on a clear, classical fabric. The Paganini variations begin and end spectrally — ghost music, with always a "hush" of isolation and worlds collapsing. His pride was in things no longer present. He was encased in romantic, formal restrictions that had disappeared. His music so often sobs, then, as if ashamed to reveal emotion, draws back and politely moves off.

Rachmaninov's piano playing was unlike that of any other virtuoso. He never put himself on a pedestal. He stayed in the shadow of the tradition which formed him. There is dismissal in all his music and it always affected his playing. It was said of him that he had hands as big as a hangman's. Big or no, they were the swiftest, lightest hands ever when needed.

This Paganini music shows plenty of Rachmaninov as a composer and the piano part needs hands as big as his to get around and cover the spaces required. It is almost a pop-piano piece, like the unfortunate second concerto. Anyone with tone enough and some pushy technique can get to play it. But this has nothing to do with the half-world the music suggests. It is a dead piece. It solicits player and listener, then draws aside the mask. And then we go back to the gambling dens of life.

Eric Himy made a strange impression. A huge person with the heft of a full back. He excelled in the spectral speediness needed for the first section. Hands flew. The octaves and



Eric Himy

thirds rustled like autumn leaves before the storm. The entire thing was muffled. It was creepy and daring in a land of shadows, lowered voices and malicious gossip. For one so large, he hovered like a moth over the keys, hardly striking them. He was over a technical show-off but, rather, the narrator of a scene.

This carried on into the second section. And then, at last, we wait for it — the whole erotic gush of the famous melody opened out petal by petal into

an opulent tropical flower, bursting under the weight of its own richness. We fell headlong into the last section. And the fall into deep night? It was done with clear open eyes, with no drooping lids. The player gave it dry and without the surge of passion so much beloved by an audience. The last section flashed like a raw fuse. The entire heavy furnishing was gone. The emptiness remained — sibilant and threatening: please leave. A few Paganini.

El-Saedi in the *Brahms* sym-

phony no. 3 gave an almost repeat version of what Himy had done with the Rachmaninov: continuous lightness of texture and relentless speed. No heavy chording, wind and brass valiant and penetrating. The tunes were done with tilt and runaway tempo, more like a Brahms pastoral symphony. It never sounded so brief.

The orchestral mechanism suddenly takes a turn like a big liner at sea changing direction. A Brahms seascape. He seems to say in this sort of music: that's how I am. The strings flow over a stormy base.

El-Saedi has done great service to many listeners by giving them a completely fresh aspect of Brahms. He has written in sound a new biography of Brahms. The third movement hovers over dangerous territory — that awful sadness. This conductor loves the parent but without too much awe. No more tears, keep it positive. So when the last waltz from Vienna ends abruptly, we go into the final section of the symphony.

What takes place in these Brahms symphonies, with their carefully marked movements? Do they mean much to a listener? What is their use since there is no Wagnerian story to suggest a narrative? The wheel of time spins, Brahms insists, and it is never on our side or his. Anguish of loss, good-bye forever. Sometimes, these great classics cease to be music at all. More like worrisome relatives we don't need but cannot do without. El-Saedi over lets anything drop: no longeurs, and no indulgence to nostalgia. Brahms made inferno music, too, like all the best music in this age. But he needs maintenance and a dusting over from time to time. El-Saedi it is who takes the photograph, but the picture is grim. So much to his credit.

### Listings

#### EXHIBITIONS

**Soumaya Jarhi (Antique Furniture)**  
New El-Zaman Gallery, 3 Adly St.  
Main Hall, Tel 337 3736. Daily  
9pm-5pm. Until 12 April.

**Alexandria Artists**  
Al-Hamra Open House Grounds,  
Giza. Tel 340 6661. Daily 9am-5pm.  
Until 15 April.

**Mohamed El-Sharawy (Sculpture) & Nabila El-Sayed (Paintings)**  
Egyptian Centre for International  
Cultural Co-operation, 11 Sagarat  
El-Dor St, Zamalek. Tel 341 5419.  
Daily 10am-5pm & 4pm-8pm. Until  
14 April.

**Mohamed Soliman (Paintings)**  
Al-Ahram Hall, Al-Ahram Building,  
El-Ghaila St. Tel 545 2725. Daily exc  
Fri, 9am-5pm. Until 16 April.

**Hassam Kahrwal (Paintings)**  
Sagor Gallery, 1 El-Sherif St,  
Downtown. Tel 393 1699. Daily exc  
Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until 16  
April.

**Awad El-Shihni**  
Mashreq Gallery, 8 Champs-Élysées  
St, Downtown. Tel 578 4004. Daily  
exc Fri, 11am-5pm. Until 16 April.

**Randa Shamsi (Photographs)**  
Sagor Gallery, AUC, Main Campus,  
El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436.  
Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm &  
4pm-5pm. Until 19 April.

**Mamsha Badawy**  
Jameel Centre Hall, Greek Campus,  
AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357  
5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-10pm.  
Until 20 April.

**Contemporary Egyptian Artists**  
Sagor Gallery, AUC, Main Campus,  
El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel 357 5436.  
Daily exc Fri & Sat, 9am-12pm &  
4pm-5pm. Until 24 April.

**Images of Egyptian Life Through**  
Travelers Eyes  
Rare Books and Special Collections  
Library, AUC, El-Sheikh Rihan St. Tel  
357 5436. Daily exc Fri & Sat,  
3:30pm-5pm. Until 30 April.

**Abu Khalil Lotfi & Wagha El-Chlani**  
Rare books and photographs.

**Salama Dawlat (Paintings)**  
Sagor Gallery, 36A Ahmed Orabi  
St, Mohandessin. Tel 346 3242. Daily  
exc Fri, 10am-5pm & 5pm-8pm. Until  
8 May.

**The Museum of Mr and Mrs Mohamed**  
Mahmoud Khalil  
Kafar El-Mahdi St, Dokki. Tel  
336 2276. Daily  
Mon, 10am-1pm &  
7:30pm-10pm.

**Egypt's largest collection**  
of nineteenth century  
European art,  
assembled by the late  
Mohamed Khalil, is  
displayed by Con-  
tact, Van Gogh, Gau-  
guin, Monet and Rodin.

**Egyptian Museum**  
Tahrir St, Downtown.  
Tel 573 4319. Daily exc  
Fri, 9am-5pm; Fri 9am-  
11:15pm & 1pm-3pm.

**Coptic Museum**  
Mar Girgis, Old Cairo.  
Tel 363 8766. Daily exc  
Fri, 9am-5pm; Fri 9am-  
11am & 1pm-3pm.

**Islamic Museum**  
Port Said St, Ahmed Maher St, Bob  
El-Khalil. Tel 390 930/390 1520.  
Daily exc Fri, 9am-5pm; Fri 9am-  
11:30am & 2pm-4pm.

**Museum of Modern Egyptian Art**  
Opera House Grounds, Giza. Tel  
340 6661. Daily exc Mon, 10am-1pm  
& 5pm-9pm.

**Mohamed Nagui Museum**  
Chateau Pyramides, 9 Mahmoud Al-  
Ghundi St, Giza. Tel 340 6661.  
A museum devoted to the paintings of  
Mohamed Nagui (1888-1956).

**Mohamed Mahdhar Museum**  
Tahrir St, Giza. Daily exc Sun and  
Mon, 9am-1:30pm.

**A permanent collection of works**  
by the painter Mohamed Mahdhar (d.  
1934), whose graphic monument to  
Said Zaghloul stands near Qasr El-Nil  
Bridge.

**FILMS**  
**Song Of The Spring Pansy**  
Egyptian Cultural Centre, 2 Qasr  
El-Nil, 106 Qasr El-Nil St, Garden  
City. 11 April, 9pm.  
Directed by Seijiro Koyama (1986).

**German Christmas in London**  
Indian Cultural Centre, 23 Talat  
Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. 11  
April, 9pm.  
Screened by Amal Bachman, Amir  
Khan and Saeed Davi.

**French Film**  
French Cultural Centre, 1 Madrasat  
El-Hayem El-Farany St, Monrovia.  
Tel 354 7679.  
Modern Cinema: Directed by Fre-  
deric Mitterand — adapted from Pro-  
f. Richard Tinsell, 11 & 17 April,  
7pm.

**German Film**  
German Cultural Centre, 23 Talat  
Harb St, Downtown. Tel 393 3396. 11  
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**Adorable Liar: Directed by M Deville**  
(1961), 16 April, 7pm.

**German Film**  
**Goethe Institute**, 3 Abdel-Salam Aref  
St, Downtown. Tel 573 9877. Screened  
by: Directed by Uta Stock (1984),  
11 April, 8:30pm.  
The White Room: Directed by Michael  
Verhoeven (1982), 17 April, 7pm.

**Cinema change their programmes**  
every Monday. The information pro-  
vided is valid through to Sunday after  
which it is wise to check with the cinema.

**El-Nona PU-Assal (Sound Asleep)**  
Bada, 24 Talat Harb St, Downtown.  
Tel 573 6362. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm,  
6pm & 9pm. Razz, Razz St, He-  
liopolis. Tel 258 0544. Daily 10am,  
1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cinema 1, 12 El-  
adad St, Downtown. Tel 779 537.  
Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.  
Diana Palace, 17 El-Adad St, Es-  
sadiya, Downtown. Tel 934 727. Daily  
10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. The  
L. Nasr City. Tel 502 9487. Daily  
10:30am, 1:30pm, 4:30pm & 9:30pm.  
Sphinx, Sphinx St, Mohandessin. Tel  
346 4017. Daily 9pm.

**Ishtakha (Lobana)**  
Tiba El-Nasr City. Tel 262 9407. Daily  
10:30am, 1:30pm, 4:30pm & 9:30pm.

**El-Harab El El-Qasra (Escape To The Top)**  
Bada, 24 Talat Harb St, Downtown.  
Tel 573 6362. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm,  
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346 4017. Daily 9pm.

**El-Harab El El-Qasra (Escape To The Top)**  
Bada, 24 Talat Harb St, Downtown.  
Tel 573 6362. Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm,  
6pm & 9pm. Razz, Razz St, He-  
liopolis. Tel 258 0544. Daily 10am,  
1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. Cinema 1, 12 El-  
adad St, Downtown. Tel 779 537.  
Daily 10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm.  
Diana Palace, 17 El-Adad St, Es-  
sadiya, Downtown. Tel 934 727. Daily  
10am, 1pm, 3pm, 6pm & 9pm. The  
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adad St, Downtown. Tel 779 537.  
Daily 10am, 1pm,

David Blake watches the awesome hordes of the Bolshoi bring down the Roman Empire



Spartacus about to be betrayed

## Brothers beneath the skin

*Spartacus* — not again. Twilight of the idols. It has been around for nearly half a century. It is big, bold, noisy, like a worn copy of *Mad Max*. With all its gruesome Soviet Empire fiery hanging in tatters it remains the political bombshell of the fifties.

Slaves! There are even more around now than there were then, even here. But like Ben Hur, like Christ, it needs a golden age Charlton Heston to pull it out of the awful trash heap of history.

Bolshoi. There are a lot of clones around. All these mistaken identities could be true. Joy, they were not. Once in a generation, it seems, we must submit to a new facial for *Spartacus*. Perhaps this is it. I, unlike you, span several generations.

There was more than a breath of the great, the awesome of yesteryear, that was the original Bolshoi. There was a smell in the theatre air of passionate physical involvement, as in the Zulu production of *Macbeth* that made thunder of another sort in the theatres of Europe a generation ago.

*Spartacus*, not the Bolshoi, is like a painting by Bosch of the *Isle of the Dead*. It is like coming into sudden contact with a dinosaur in your garden. This is no happy position for a self-respecting ballet company in 1996. It may well be devoid of any contact with the present, though this is no excuse. It is a spectacle with little to do with the twentieth century except perhaps for the question of human slavery. What does this brontosaurus offer for the ballet-goer of 1996? Its tradition holds firm.

The vessel is out of date but the tradition will last a millennium. It is just that *Spartacus* happens to be ballet, like it or not. Both tradition and vessel live in the dancers who perform it. They continue, though the scenario-making of the ballet has passed over. But the living souls who deliver it are warm and creative. You cannot ever overlook or dismiss a traditionally trained Russian dancer. They stand like bronze idols in the surrounding flood and are the heart of the matter. They lift the heart. They fill the vast spaces of any opera house with their force, radiance and energy. These dancers, trained in this tradition, are the living hope of the art of the ballet. They tirelessly hurl themselves through the air, out of a dead tradition and into a new one. We must be thankful that there are still Russian dancers around who can deliver this message to an audience. They are the ones who have haunted the twentieth century with their physical glamour and splendour. Russian dancers are like a close embrace. Have you ever been embraced closely, embraced like you were, really, the audience? And then be loved totally, acknowledged as the real audience of a real performer? This is what the Russian idols used to give, and still do, so it seems.

This large company, from the small roles to the megastars, perform like demons. Through the discipline the individual is always there: stamping, whirling, exuding, even, God forbid, sweating. Their living involvement haunts the memory. No other dancer ever danced like a Russian, or at least like one emerging from the Russian tradition. It is a hope for the future, that for sure we know, because they are there and their teachers are passing on what used to be called the sacred flame, when it could be called anything.

Plenty of flames around inside the Cairo Opera on opening night of *Spartacus*. In spite of its size, the ballet is a simple tale of four dissimilar people — two men, two women caught in the coils of change, pitting themselves against the ossification of established power. Very splendid petrol to throw into an already burning fire. These four dancers express as best as they can love, hope and the endurance needed to toil. Yuri Grigorovich put together a timeless piece of balletic machinery here. He grabbed the message, wove it into an unsinkable fire ball, and set it rolling out into the demented twentieth century. The secret fire in its middle? The Russian dancers themselves.

*Spartacus*, in this version, will never be danced by any dancers but Russian, as surely as Flamenco can be danced only by the Spanish. These dancers are music. They do not need to be told what dance means. They know. It is the blood flowing through their bodies. Russian pianists, as Horowitz used to joke, head the list — so do their dancers. They expand themselves far out beyond the areas of known physical possibility. Their tradition is not steel — it seems to be uranium.

In the excitement of the arrival of such guests brought here largely by the passionate involvement of the director of the Cairo Opera Ballet, Mr Abdel-Monem Kamel, himself part of the Bolshoi tradition, there was some chaos about the no-arrival of programmes on opening night — causing possible mistakes in the identification of roles. In this age of sex-war liberation it is odd to see *Spartacus* is nearly an all-male ballet. Meo do nearly all of the dancing, whether as stars or supports. It is a man-show, not a girl-one. The two women, Phrygia, wife of Spartacus, and Aegina, the soul and body mate of Crassus, have many moving duets with their respective loves. But their roles are essentially secondary to their men. Spartacus and Crassus, brothers under the skin — Hamlet and Horatio with a soccer world cup macho mating call.

The stage seethed with men. Spartacus sweats like a wrestler. Crassus, more clothed, positively revels in showing overwhelming physical splendour, and Alexandre Vetrov in the part ignites every scene in which he

appears. But who is the slave — who the master? Maybe the master is mistress. It is Phrygia, Gallina Stepanenko, who — after all — manipulates everybody. For her, everything is slavery, except money. Sex is flesh and bone and dies. Liberation? There is none. And so the men, magnificent mountains, hurl themselves at a fate the solution of which is out of their control. Except for Phrygia, the warning is salutary. Is she the future, what it stands for? Stepanenko, the grand star, played this role — impossible to say danced, because she acted so eloquently. Like Lubov Tcherickova of old, she held the stage turmoil in a grip of ice and fire.

The Cairo Opera Orchestra surpassed all possibilities. It

wove its way through the endless variety and sheer surge of Khachaturian splendid, late baroque decadence with the encouragement of Alexandre Sotnikov. He knows the music so intimately, the over-weight, over-blown ooze was made as the composer wished: a high Romantic mode into a classic format suitable for dancing. Sotnikov knows dancers' needs, so all was solved. Nadejda Gratcheva as Phrygia clung to her Spartacus like a frail tropical plant around an electric power house. Both the women's roles were expressed with understanding. Contrast between their respective social status notwithstanding, they both had the same perfect legs the Russian system always produces. Power and elevation and extension breathlessly held but with no muscle over-development. These were ladies, not muscle-bound javelin throwers.

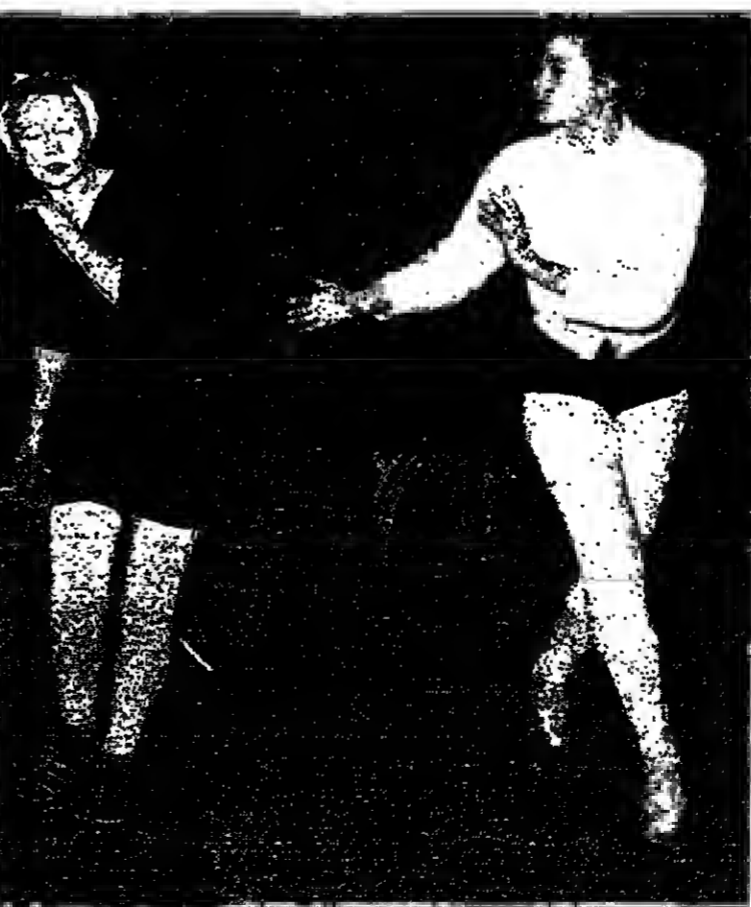
So to the men. The equation is unsolvable without a just valuation of the male involvement in this ballet. Choreographers of great quality know that the male dancer always excels at showing effort overcome, at displaying victory over struggle. This is me up here — watch it. The sweat and the flexing and the spendthrift courage at flinging the body through almost unendurable risks is shattering to watch. Whatever or whoever you are — the thrill is the same. It is the thrill of footballers, tennis and racing drivers. Spartacus and Crassus confronting each other own the ballet and unless majestic unending power and beauty of physique in these two roles. What is said can be forgotten, what is seen even more so, but what is felt goes on to the end and beyond.

*Spartacus*, once again, once every decade here, has come — and for some will never go. It is the Russian people and their tradition that stick. The dancers' bodies are circles of light. But they are something else too. They are the mystery of art.

This piece began with the twilight of the idols. Perhaps one should reconsider, for it is less twilight than dawn.



Crassus played by Alexandre Vetrov



L-R: Galina Ulanova in Cairo, 1996; with Maya Plisitskaya in Cairo, 1961

## Spinning through the eras

David Blake pays homage to Galina Ulanova, the mythical ballerina accompanying the Bolshoi

And she's here again in Cairo, after over 30 years. Forget all the decades between. Like the real Chanel and not the product — cut off her head and she's 16. Even with the head on, she looks more teen-age than adult.

And who, really, is she? There's a lot of sifting to do with the Ulanova myth. Myth she is — and not legend. Legends are accretions still connected to the living object. Myths go beyond ordinary gossip and factual matters. Myths have no body problems at all. They often grow out from the pages of poets which send them out into space. And that's more or less where Ulanova always belonged.

She's a space object connected to nothing. Not the Bolshoi? Bolshoi was her kindergarten. She went beyond it into some very ambiguous territory. Myths answer to nothing. They are facts that have no proofs. Ballerinas have bodies to dance with, but she was always the ballerina assoluta without a body.

Snow Maiden? More ice queen. She was loved by a huge audience outside all the forbidden territories of the Soviet Union. No one ever said they knew her. Time passes — Ulanova not. She will never die. She will dissolve deeper in her myth into a disturbing silence which will haunt long after the dance is over. Moscow — no, she's

from St Petersburg. Her name is Galina Sergeyevna, daughter of Serge and Marina Romanovna. Names are important to myths. There are warm myths and cold ones. Ulanova's is on the chilly side. Helen of Troy early became a myth, so with Ulanova. Was Helen ever in Egypt? The myth gives no answer.

Was Ulanova ever anywhere but nowhere? She worked, probably slaved, like all great souls, like St Teresa of Avila, but her mythologisation began so early that such things soon dropped away from her. But one thing stuck — she learned or was assisted to manipulate the dance from Vaganova, herself a myth. Vaganova, after the shortest career in the most exalted ballet scene, St Petersburg, became the greatest pedagogical figure in the Soviet Union — in fact in all ballet history.

Her pupils were a legion of great artists, culminating in the final pinnacle of ballerina hierarchy: Marina Semyonova and Galina Ulanova. Semyonova, about two years younger than Ulanova, had a great career. These two dancers were close, but far distant from each other in career, looks and performance. Coming from the same balletic surrogate mother, they stayed far apart, though their respective admirers did not.

There are those living who were wit-

nesses to Semyonova's exalted art when she got away out of the Soviet Union to Paris in 1935 and at the Paris opera, danced *Swan Lake* with Lifar. She had also a great career at the Bolshoi, until 1952. And was probably the first Soviet ballerina ever to dance Giselle. It was through Semyonova's performances in Paris that "the West" was introduced to the new age of Soviet dancing which, like Diaghilev earlier in the century, was to surprise and amaze Europe culminating in the positively seismic success of the first Soviet Bolshoi visit to Vienna and the rest of Europe in the early 1950s. These were strange dark days after the sunset European glow of the 1930s.

Ulanova is part of these eras. These shadowy years helped fix her movements into larger historical events than ballet. Her mythic dimensions burgeoned far out of the closed bourgeois world of the dance.

Ulanova. It is in these equivocal years her myth took off. Left the earth and passed into Homeric epic. By the 40s and 50s, Europe and the world were descending into a new layer of the inferno. The pill changed

photo: Hassan El-Touil

who do not have to aspire to the art of revelation which is close to dancing and prayer. Few humans attain positions as these mythic monsters. Caruso, Melba, Nijinsky, Pavlova, Garbo, Callas, Ulanova. Their destiny is astounding. Seldom in one life are they met or experienced. And Ulanova has the strangest life of all. Most of them live in times of disaster because time is the absolute disaster, but Ulanova saw the world and its material aspect cracked to bits. She was at the heart of the terror — and still danced on.

She has a riveting stare, but, fortunately, unlike the Gorgon, she doesn't turn anyone into stone. She has her way. She's an assoluta, and you are not allowed to forget it. A hit horing — Melba for example was boisterously good-humoured, even with the Emperor of Austria.

After the Hitler war, the Bolshoi and Ulanova began to merge into the same commodity. She had fine-spun discretion in all things. This must have been one of the most useful parts of her survival kit. She became more than ballerina — she became the Soviet, almost a cultural travel unit and propaganda weapon on point. She was the Russian flying saucer of ballet, an exalted, protected, privileged person — more Kremlin than Bolshoi in the news of the world. And as so one ever knew what he

next, much of this uncertainty spilled over onto Ulanova.

She survived this era better than most — certainly better than Kirsten Flagstad, the greatest voice of the twentieth century. Flagstad was hard-hit by her husband's mistaken closeness to Quisling, the Gauleiter of Norway. Ulanova was lucky: she knew her storm routine: stay close to the almost sacrosanct Bolshoi, with herself as chief Vestal.

Ballet began and was formulated into art by the Italians in the seventeenth century. By the eighteenth, it passed to France, and, early in the nineteenth to Russia where it grew into what Ulanova stands for: a style, a class of perfection and a religion. There was no ballet anywhere else. Hence the shining light that, even in 1996, radiates from her.

She and the Bolshoi are almost one and the same word. She is perfectly built. Neither tall nor short. All projectiles, arms and legs, are proportioned harmoniously. Facially, she was never beautiful, unlike Olga Spessivtzeva, another ballerina suprema. Not much elevation but an eerie lightness. She travelled on air — nothing more. The saucer hardly ever touched down to earth. When she danced, the body of flesh and blood ignited and she passed into the realms of the spirit for which there are no words, just the force of the dance.

There is this thing ahead surrounding her, a proscenium. And then, the audience. And then the theatre. Let it all come down. I dance. The rest is God.

She has proved to be greater than war, politics, or money — even greater than her own fame. And that was unique. Flying saucer, ice queen, pale-faced mime, century-old teenager, she like Debureau and Jean-Louis Barrault, is one of the last of the Enfants du Paradis.

## Plain Talk

Who says that poetry is dead? Reading through over half a dozen poetry collections by Egyptian, American and British poets, lying in front of me, I could not help selecting three that I regard to be of special significance. A collection of poems by Harry G. Miller, Dean of the Department of Adult and Further Education at the American University in Cairo, another by Lesley Briggs, an English woman married to an Egyptian living in Alexandria, and a third one by a rediscovered American poet, William Carls Williams are some of the poetry collections that have arrested my attention.

Come, Sit Awhile, the second poetry collection by Miller, has been interpreted, not merely translated, by Naim Atti. Such poems as "City of the Dead", "In Edfu", "Hila", "Cairo", "Postmark Cairo" and "A Home in Edfu" contain recollections of Miller's sojourn in Egypt.

Both collections, the original and the interpretation, support the view that poetry should be translated by a poet. Indeed, going through the two collections, one realises that, while the original themes are still there in the Arabic rendition, the poems are completely new ones. The poems are beautifully illustrated by Miller, and one feels that the illustrations complement the text.

The poems, no doubt, reflect the influence of Egypt as a source of inspiration. Poems such as "Farewell", of which I quote a few significant lines below, are an eloquent expression of love, friendship, peace and creation. "When I was not looking — / Eternity ended / On a June afternoon / In Cairo / Three years off / Belonging left / Unclaiming why / Past friendships / Now made famous / By silence — / Leaves time unfilled / Waiting for a future."

Lesley Briggs' *Poems 1942-1992*, on the other hand, Egyptian-inspired, were, interestingly enough, written before coming to Egypt. Her poem, "Cleopatra", for example, mourns "the passing of a Queen" who was "fair, she was all colour and warmth" and who "was so beautiful... There will only be Memories of her now, and legend after".

After living in Egypt, her poems no longer give precedence to legend over reality. Thus in one poem, "From the Arabic", her beloved is "my Nile, from whose remote and undiscovered source / my life draws meaning / Flood then, inundate / that very life's waste Egypt / Quench thou my pain, beloved. Give me peace."

Living in Alexandria, it is not surprising that the city should be a source of inspiration to Lesley Briggs who recalls "the vanishing Alexandria" where "unresting, Pharos veers / His bright, unceasing beam seeks out the lost denizens of the years / seeks out the obliterated name or face / pierces the myriad ruins of this place / Lights my lethargic muse to new Alexandrines".

In one of her later poems, "On a Discussion Programme, with Poets", Briggs reveals her concept of poetry: "My poems simply are — indeed, as I am / A poem is just, like a sun, or a flower".

A sun and a flower are everlasting. So is poetry.

Mursi Saad El-Din

# Time for the environment

Cairo has been ranked the most polluted city in the world, which means it has supplanted Mexico City. How bleak is the picture? There is no such thing as the most polluted city in the world, because there are so many variables that are taken into account. There are many types of pollutants and [pollution] varies from day to day.

However, Egypt is probably the highest with regards to the level of particles in the air, which is many times higher than international standards. Although according to international standards the level of lead is quite high in Cairo, the levels of other pollutants like nitrogen oxide, ozone and carbon monoxide are lower than in many places. There is no precise ranking for any city, but you can say Cairo is one of the 10 or 15 most polluted cities.

What is being done to remove Cairo from the most polluted cities' list? Cairo is a growing city and we have to move at a faster pace than the increasing rate of pollution. Advancement has been made with regards to the levels of lead. The air contains 20 per cent less lead than three years ago, which is very, very positive. Otherwise, the level of lead particles in the air would have been much higher because of the increase in the number of cars.

We are gradually introducing unleaded fuel, and in three years there will be numerous outlets for this fuel. We also intend to give economic incentives to importers and local manufacturers of cars which operate on unleaded fuel.

But we already have unleaded fuel on the market. This is only to serve cars that are temporarily in the

country like diplomatic cars and trip-ticket vehicles. The average car in Egypt is not equipped to use unleaded petrol, because only cars with a catalytic converter can use it. The converter changes bad gases into benign ones. Therefore, if the car is not equipped with it, the unleaded petrol could produce hazardous gases. This is why unleaded petrol was introduced at a high price, because it is not intended for the average consumer.

What are the plans for using another non-polluting car fuel like Compressed Natural Gas (CNG), which has already been introduced for a number of public transport buses? Some companies were established to convert cars to operate on the dual system (petrol and CNG), although the cost at LE5,000 is somewhat high. However, companies are offering a very special deal for taxis under which they pay 50 per cent of the cost and the rest is paid in instalments during a pay-back period of 18 months.

To convert all public transport vehicles is much more costly, because the whole engine needs to be replaced. This can't be done overnight, but piecemeal: all new buses must be equipped with CNG engines, while old ones which come up for renewal are replaced with CNG engines.

Are factories observing the laws regulating their polluting emissions?

It's a matter of introducing the instruments that enable polluters to adhere to the law. You can't pass a law without offering the technology, financing instruments, economic incentives and training and [raising] public awareness of the problem, which is what we are doing now.

Currently we are working on the most important

In 1982 the Environmental Affairs Committee was founded and later developed into an agency with a very limited mandate. A board of directors was established in 1991 and the Egyptian Environmental Affairs Agency (EEAA) was set up in 1994. Salah Hafez has been director of environmental affairs for the government since 1985. He talked to **Nevine Khalil**



## The little devil

As a child I was repeatedly told that the powers that ruled over me, be they natural or otherwise, had an inbuilt capacity to penetrate my most secret thoughts and observe my every deed. Nothing remained hidden for long and punishment would invariably follow encroachments, albeit sometimes in mysterious ways. So I had better watch it. I generally did, although personal experience belied these assertions, but my budding scepticism was to be brutally squashed, before it had time to bloom, by what happened to Patsy's family.

Patsy's father was the Polish ambassador to Egypt; her mother was my mother's best friend. Patsy was a little devil with angelic looks. The perception of her absolute goodness was further enhanced by the transparency of her amazingly blue eyes. The nuns at school recognised her as a kindred spirit and she was always put in charge of all the little children, although she was not much older herself.

My mother often invited Patsy along when we went to the Fish Garden on Sundays. An only child then, I was thrilled when she came with us, although I always knew what mischief lay behind the radiant smile.

We met other children in the garden. Our favourites were Arnoldino and Bernadino, two brothers whose mother always dressed them in olive-green safari shorts. They were coiffed with matching tops to protect their freckled faces from the sun.

Arnoldino would have provided a decent model for the inventor of Miss Piggy but Patsy had a soft spot for him and always insisted that he come along on our explorations of the fish grotto. I didn't really care for him but I knew better than to cross Patsy. Besides, I was quite happy to trail behind them, knowing that whatever they did was bound to be exciting.

Patsy and Arnoldino were not as thrilled with my company, however, as I was with theirs. Fearing the wrath of the ubiquitous powers, I always prudently cast myself in the role of the silent observer. Does don't usually like watchers: Patsy and Arnoldino were no exception to this rule. Consequently, they must have often and fervently wished that I would simply disappear. The natural next step was their decision to make their wish come true.

They probably hatched their plan well in advance, during one of those whispering sessions from which I was always excluded. Whatever the case may have been, one bright Sunday morning they announced — out of our mothers' earshot — that we were going to explore the forbidden part of the garden, the one which contained the reservoirs and the irrigation canals. During the day these reservoirs were full of water. At night, the gardeners opened the sluices, allowing the water to flood the canals which carried it to the flower beds.

We squeezed silently through the fence, suffering just a few scratches, and emerged on the forbidden side. We stood excitedly at the edge of one of the reservoirs, and for once Patsy and Arnoldino made sure that I was not left behind. Suddenly Patsy whispered something to Arnoldino; who giggled. "Look at the frog," he said. "The next thing I know, I was choking on mouthfuls of froggy water."

The reservoir was not really deep and I was in no danger of drowning but the two children must have suddenly realised that their prank could get them in serious trouble this time. Not only had I not disappeared without a trace, but they would have some explaining to do regarding the state I was in.

"She fell in, she fell in," they both started shouting. Patsy tried to fish me out with a rake, while Arnoldino went to fetch my mother. The two culprits had no need to give her an official version of the accident. The facts spoke for themselves; warned repeatedly not to go into this part of the garden, I had disobeyed. The expected consequences had followed and Patsy, the little angel was in the process of saving me. Patsy basked in the glory of her heroic act while I was being told in no uncertain terms what I deserved besides eating mud.

For a while this incident confirmed me in the belief that adults had it all wrong: there were no unseen powers watching. But then, in the turmoil which followed the end of the war, Patsy's father not only lost his post, but was unable to return to Poland. Friends rallied around, offering whatever help they could. I saw a lot of Patsy during those sad days, just before she left with her parents for Australia. She never mentioned going on adventures. She was mostly quiet. All the mischief seemed to have seeped out of her. One day she whispered in despair: "This happened because I am bad." For years after, I applied myself to never straying from the straight and narrow path.

Fayza Hassan

The numbers of runaways are rising steadily: it would seem that, for some children, anywhere is better than home. **Reem Leila** investigates

## Escape to the street

Third World societies are often presented by Western scholars as being based on close kinship ties. But if this myth was ever a reality, today more and more individuals seem to be falling through the cracks.

Fayza Sayed, at eleven, recently escaped from eight months of cruelty and fights. "My parents always quarrel with each other and hit me. When they locked me up in my room for two days without food, I decided to run away. It was just the last straw. After that they found me [she was begging on the street], but I will run away again if they start beating me again," says Fayza.

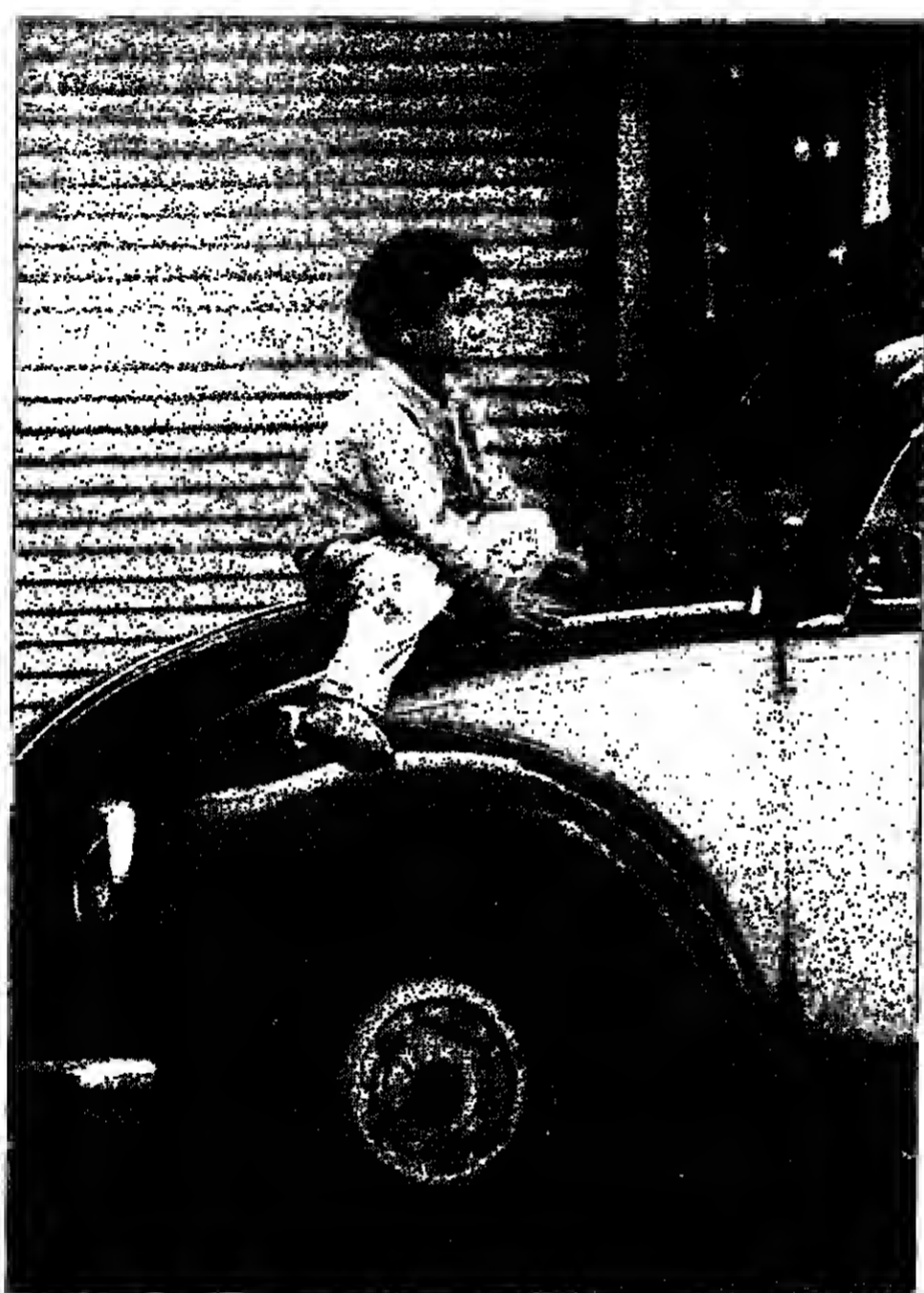
According to Dr Samir Naim, professor of sociology at Ain Shams University, children run away from home for reasons ranging from poverty to their rejection of society's authority. "The family is always trying to force children to obey social rules and regulations. If the family fails, the result will be extremely violent rejection by the children," Naim adds. Divorce, broken homes, and neglect or abuse of children, he adds, are the main causes of juvenile delinquency.

Mass media, especially television, is not to be considered as merely a means of entertainment. It is one of the principal means of direct communication with the public, and children are especially susceptible to the passive absorption of information it encourages. Dr Ahmed Zayed, sociology professor at Cairo University, says: "The means of advertising for certain types of clothes or toys, especially imported brands, encourage frustration, specifically among children, because they cannot afford such things. This encourages them to resort to unacceptable means to obtain them. Children escape from their families to steal or to work as drug dealers in order to get more money." Other experts feel television — especially advertising campaigns — present values in contradiction to those of Egyptian society, and give insufficient time to educational programmes.

Runaway children often resort to lying or changing their names to mislead their families, and to prevent the police from catching them. Attorney Mohamed Saleh, from the Juvenile Investigation Department, says: "Children leaving home has recently become an irritating problem. The phenomenon has become much more prevalent in the last decade, the numbers of runaway children rising by nearly 36 per cent. Boys tend to run away more frequently, since they are generally more daring than girls. Of all runaways, boys make up around 55 per cent, as against around 45 per cent for girls."

Dr Ahmed El-Magdoub, professor of penal law at the National Centre for Social and Criminological Research, recommends that "some items of the law concerning juvenile delinquency be amended to suit our society. Parents who neglect their children, and force their daughters to marry older men for their money must be severely punished. Legislation should be issued to prohibit the marriage of young girls to old men."

Safra Dagma



Life has become intolerable at home

photo: Sherif Sonbol

## Whose fault?

CHILDREN might run away from their parents because of negligence, poverty or ill-treatment. If they run away, they risk becoming victims, once again. Many sociologists blame parents for neglecting their children. They also believe that parents are responsible for the abuse to which their children are exposed — even if the child is kidnapped. Kidnapped children are often raped, sold or used for begging.

Baher is a two-year-old child who was kidnapped and sold to an infertile woman. "At the beginning, I did not understand why my baby was taken away from me. I was shocked and did nothing except pray and search for him," said Magda, who used to work but became a housewife after the incident. After three months of "pain and agony," Magda's brother and husband brought the child home. The police had found him in Suez. "I beseech all mothers to take care of their children," added Magda.

Haggag is a 13-year-old boy who was kidnapped by a merchant and raped. "He told me he wanted to buy merchandise from my father. He took me to his house and raped me in front of 15 other children," Haggag's father found him by accident, selling goods in the street. "I was afraid of running away from them," said Haggag. "They threatened me: they told me if I did, they'd kidnap my sister and rape my mother."

Mahmoud El-Kurdy, professor of sociology at Cairo University, says that "parents are considered the real criminals in such crimes" and advocates the establishment of more social institutions to provide care to those children. "As for those who kidnap the children," he added, "they should be severely punished. They should be imprisoned for 10 years instead of only three."

According to Dr Sahar Hashem, a psychiatry professor at Al-Azhar University, such criminals are completely devoid of feeling and were probably exposed to such crimes at a young age. Children who are exposed to such abuse should be hospitalised and treated, he said. "Psychological treatment is essential because it will prevent them from becoming rapists when they grow up."

Fayza Hassan

## Artichokes and veal soup

**Ingredients:**  
6 artichokes cleaned, quartered and immersed in solution mentioned in issue No. 265  
1/2 kilo veal chunks  
4 or 5 cups of veal stock  
1/4 kilo carrots (diced)  
1 bunch parsley leaves (finely chopped)  
2 heaped tsp. flour  
4 tsp. fresh lemon juice  
1 tsp. dairy cream (single or double)  
Salt & pepper

**Method:**  
Boil the veal chunks until well cooked and set aside in its stock. Melt the butter in a cooking pan, then add the flour stirring it until it slightly colours, then add the lemon juice and the stock. Stir them in together until they blend well and slightly thicken. Season, then add the carrots and artichokes. Cover and simmer over very low heat until they cook and become tender. Add more stock if needed. Uncover and add the veal chunks, stir them in and simmer for 5 more minutes. Uncover and add the dairy cream. Blend it in and turn off the heat. Add the parsley sprinkling it on top.

Serve hot as a starter or your menu.

Moushira Abdel-Malek

## Not quite by appointment

Nigel Ryan on some royal connections

Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II, I read in a newspaper recently, rather prides herself on her hospitality. She also owns a house in Scotland, by the River Dee, called Balmoral. By one of those quotidian quirks of coincidence that make up life's supposedly rich tapestry, there is also a Chinese restaurant in Zamalek called The Balmoral. The proprietors of both establishments are, in a manner of speaking, in the hospitality business, though that is where any similarity ends.

Balmoral, Scotland, is Walter Scott's gone wild — all turrets, endless gables of leaded glass windows, and when Her Majesty is in residence, courtiers in kilts. The Balmoral in Zamalek is a more modest affair. It was once, I believe, a hotel, though the construction of the 26th of July overpass put paid to the charms of its rooms, which commanded views of the passing traffic and little else. The dining room, however, overlooks the gardens of the Centre of Arts, Zamalek, and beyond them to the River Nile. It has remained in business while the rooms have closed.

To reach the restaurant you pass through the entrance of a residential block and continue up the stairs to the first floor. The dining room is in fact rather a large space, and the windows allow pleasant views. But any sense of spaciousness is mitigated against by the mid-brown toned wood veneer wallpaper and one of those large murals — so popular in the seventies — of a natural wonder, in this case a waterfall occupying an entire wall. Combined with the fish tank, mismatched pyrex plates, and wall to wall carpeting, the overall effect is of a sitting room in a rented apartment in need of renovation. This may sound unattractive, the trick being, I suppose, to think of it as cosy.

Down to the menu. There is a kind of cuisine that has very little to do with mainland China. It may have something to do with Taiwan, that haven of capitalism, at least inasmuch as it is the prerogative of small time emigrant entrepreneurs. It consists of sections headed fish, pork, beef and chicken. And in each section the same dishes appear — chicken with bamboo shoots and mushrooms, pork with bamboo shoots and mushrooms, beef with bamboo shoots and noodles. You get the picture. The menu can themselves seem quite endless, though you can usually cut them down by a quarter, since one in every four dishes is really the same.

From the long list we decided to start with — you've guessed it — spring rolls, and stir fried vegetables. These were to be followed by chicken with bamboo shoots, pork with garlic sauce and fried rice with beef.

But to begin at the beginning. First, six dishes of appetisers, courtesy of the house. These were hopeful affairs. The kim chi, rather than comprising cabbage in a chili sauce, had been properly fermented. There were strips of marinated bamboo shoots and a pleasant potato dish that tasted strongly of sesame oil. The spring rolls were what one would expect, the stir fried vegetables were in fact the same as the chicken with bamboo shoots, only minus the chicken and with dried mushrooms instead. The pork with garlic sauce contained refried, battered pieces of meat and the carrots and peas that reappeared in the fried rice with beef. The latter was surprisingly glutinous.

Together with two soft drinks and a bottle of mineral water, the bill came to just over LE70.

Nice view.

The Balmoral, 157 26th of July Street, Zamalek. Tel: 34 06 761

## Al-Ahram Weekly

### Crossword

By Samia Abdennour

#### ACROSS

- Award (5)
- Health resorts (4)
- Examine (4)
- Music-theatre (5)
- Airplane ground motion before taking off or after landing (4)
- Smeared (4)
- Pointed (5)
- Referenda (9)
- Non-Commissioned Officer, abb. (3)
- Edge (3)
- Fier (5)
- Provide food (5)
- Mutilate (4)
- Angle (6)
- Proclaims (8)
- Avoid (5)
- Tempos (3)
- Consume (3)
- Obligation (4)

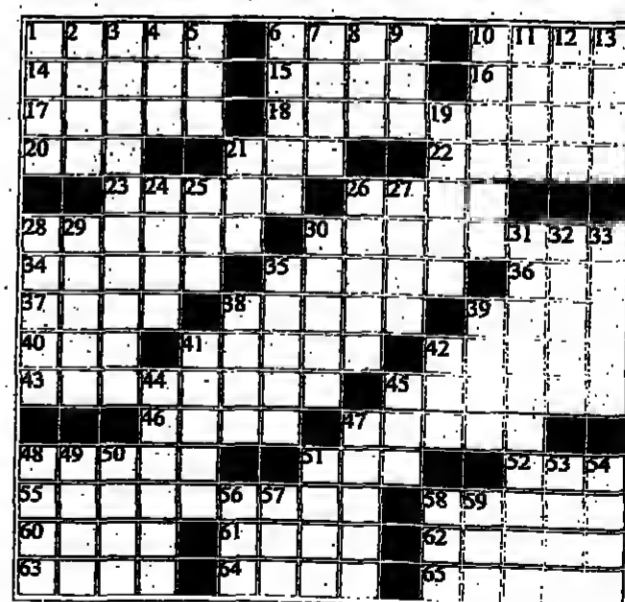


Last week's solution

- Declains (5)
- Polygonal recess (5)
- Miss McGraw (3)
- Leaves (5)
- Brutal (5)
- Tells (8)
- Threefold (6)
- Wagers (4)
- Dependable (5)
- Climbed (5)
- Method (3)
- Fury (3)
- Magistrates; rulers (9)
- Rot (5)
- Spanish cheers (4)
- Revise (4)
- Make merry (5)
- Roman clan (4)
- Dampens (4)
- Fermented grape juices (5)

#### DOWN

- Lament (4)
- Ode (4)
- Practicing social equality (10)
- 100 square metres (3)
- Young man (3)
- Pilot (5)
- Open hand (4)
- Chopping tool (2)
- Tius (2)
- Token of disgrace (6)
- Composed; chilly (4)
- Italian river (4)
- Weather directions (4)



- Ends (5)
- Personal pronoun (3)
- Boy's name (4)
- Golf necessity (3)
- Venison, beef and mutton (5)
- Performs (4)
- Lebanese emblem tree (5)
- Small seed (5)
- Fender mishaps (5)
- Liberty and equality supplanter (10)
- Canvas carrier (5)
- Bot. axial cylinder in stem (5)
- Lures (5)
- Small pig (4)
- Region (4)
- Odd (5)
- Bawl (3)
- Haul (6)
- Play thing (3)
- Persists (5)
- Excited (5)
- Portrayal; part (4)
- Furnace (4)
- Summons (4)
- Appraise (4)
- Views (4)
- Novel (5)
- Bullad (5)
- Morning moisture (3)
- Biblical high priest (3)

The fastest growing Internet user in the Arab world, Egypt, is on its way to becoming a computer-driven society. But life in cyberspace brings with it an entire new reality. **Al-Ahram Weekly** looks at the prospects

# Over the rainbow

A pot of gold supposedly lies at the end of every rainbow. The metaphor here could stand for material wealth, success or even love. In cyberspace — the imaginary land often described as the space between computers — rainbows lead to a wealth of information.

At the Marriott last month, 450 businesspeople, government officials, and Internet users ate, drank and slept in cyberspace. During three days of sessions and technology exhibitions from 25-27 March at the "Cainet '96: Internet and Information Superhighway Conference and Exhibition", the government's information technology arm — the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC) — rallied support for the construction of Egypt's information society.

In plainer terms, RITSEC is talking about both preparing the country for computer communications as well as saturating society with information technology. But the building of a so-called information highway — which would link the entire country to a network of computers on the Internet — is ridden with roadblocks.

As Tarek Kamel, head of RITSEC's communications department, notes, "We are just at the beginning, a lot of issues need to be clarified." Not the least of these is preparing the population of a developing country to live in a fully wired society while simultaneously benefiting the nation's socio-economic development. How to present the information available on the Internet to a largely non-English speaking population, ensuring equal access for all sectors of the population, and sustaining the network within the country's existing infrastructure are all outstanding issues.

The Internet is not a newcomer to Egypt. The

Amongst the computer savvy and the techno-illiterate, Jihan Ammar finds that optimism is contagious

mother network of computer networks was launched here in 1993, over two decades after the US government's Department of Defense initiated an experimental computer network to support military research in 1969. Although nobody owns the Internet, various commercial and governmental service providers worldwide now run and finance it under bilateral and multilateral agreements. The 1980s were the network's nurturing years and today's number of international Internet users exceeds 40 million.

Locally, the numbers are very small. Kamel, dubbed Mr Internet by his colleagues, estimates there are currently 15,000-16,000 Internet users in Egypt. Among these are 7,000 users at academic institutions, 6,000-7,000 in commercial venues, 1,500 government users, and 200 non-governmental organisations. The Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) is responsible for connecting government bodies. RITSEC provides the service to commercial users and the Foreign Relations Coordinating Unit (FRCU) covers the country's universities.

On the Internet someone at Cairo University, besides having access to any on-line computer in the world, can talk via a tool known as InterRelay Chat (IRC) to someone at the American University in Cairo, a 15-minute drive away, without ever seeing them or hearing their voice. Government agencies, commercial sites, educational institutions, private individuals, and international organisations are all connected to the Internet via high-speed telephone circuits and satellite links.

Once the government increases the Internet's size

and capacity, the future is wide open; public computer stations, on-line universities and libraries, financial transactions via digital cash, on-line voting in elections, and television and video teleconferencing are all possibilities. According to Kamel, Egypt's infrastructure will be boosted to support an upgrade in services.

RITSEC's optimism is seemingly contagious. The enthusiastic users who offered their testimonials at the Cairo conference have evidently caught the technology bug. As Cheryl Wafie, editor-in-chief of the Cairo-based monthly publication, *Computerworld Middle East* points out, "Everyone wants to be on-line. There is a huge demand."

Optimism breeds ambition. According to IDSC's manager of the information highway, Sherif Hashem, IDSC will link all government bodies by the end of next year including Cairo, Giza, Alexandria, Sohag, Port Said, Aswan, Luxor, and Daqahliya. These envisioned links would connect hospitals and schools. IDSC's plans, starting with the establishment of databases with local statistical information, were initiated during the last few months of 1995. To date, the governorate networks are mainly supporting decision makers.

Databases will provide information about legislation, developmental studies, human resources, economic establishments, natural resources, foreign debt and trade. With so much information available to the public, some serious challenges surface.

The cultural factor is one thorny issue. Access to the Internet means a user can gain information from any part of the world. But most of the information is in English. Some international companies have de-

veloped interfaces to accommodate Latin-based languages. But, as Manta Seikali, technical support manager for Middle East Operations at the Canada-based Alis Technologies, notes, "To date, one cannot send a French é character and be sure that it will arrive intact and readable everywhere; forget about Arabic!"

Alis' solution has been to market a browser which users can work with in Arabic. But there are snags further down the line — if a user wants to retrieve a document or download it onto their own computer, the document will arrive in its original language — usually English.

According to Seikali, there is growing resentment of the use of a single language and culture from an increasing number of non-Anglophone users and the few functionally bilingual users. "The cultural diversity and thus the linguistic diversity of the Internet must reflect the world's diversity," insists Seikali.

There have been scattered attempts from Jordan and Kuwait to get Arabic content on-line. But according to Wafie, one obstacle is that a majority of Arab countries are not willing to provide information on-line. One of the most important elements of a wired world is a give-and-take relationship. "The real challenge is for Egyptians to provide their own information," says Wafie.

Another problem is ensuring equal access for all. RITSEC and IDSC say they are building an information society from a grassroots level. Nadine Barsoun, environmental systems specialist at RITSEC and a volunteer at the Association for the Protection of the Environment (APE) says that the area's residents are learning "step by step" how to use e-

mail. So far, they are becoming familiar with the technology by performing mainly administrative tasks such as downloading messages. But with the language barrier and some people's computerphobia, grassroots efforts are limited.

Since only two per cent of the population own a personal computer, wiring the society involves making the service available in public places. Increasing coverage and improving access necessitates investing in growth and development. Egypt must consider computer use as important and families must be able to afford the technology if the Internet is to take off, says Wafie.

"When more wealth is created and people have larger amounts of disposable income, they can purchase computers," she adds. But awareness is growing. According to Wafie: "The middle and lower classes know that the way ahead for their children is computers and English."

Ahmed Nazif, executive manager of IDSC, explains that management commitment, staff and training are also crucial. The first step is creating a vital core: "Those who know how to navigate [the Internet] create a sort of nucleus," says Nazif.

The Regional Information Technology Institute (RITI), established by RITSEC, aims at supporting "information technology, software and management development in the Arab region for the delivery of first-class professional managers and experts using state-of-the-art information technology concepts, tools and techniques," according to their stated objectives.

Such support centres will certainly facilitate the evolution of the Internet in Egypt and according to Nazif, "Despite the negative aspects, the balance is still positive."

## Business on-line

Egypt is poised to reap great benefits by conducting business on-line, writes **Jasmine Maklad**

Sony, Time and IBM, are among the thousands of companies that provide information and do business on the Internet, an informal network of inter-linked computers connecting millions of personal computers (PCs) and mainframes worldwide. Banks, car dealers, hotels, fast food outlets are also all on the Internet (informally known as the net by users), reaping the benefits of communications technology.

In 1994, total inter-world trade (exports and imports) exceeded US\$7 trillion. Eighty per cent of this is dominated by a mere 23 countries, clustered in three geographical regions. These countries conduct business on the Internet, via global information superhighways, where financial transactions are greatly facilitated by electronic data interchange applications.

"We cannot underestimate the importance of the Internet to the business community. Absolutely every kind of transaction takes place on the net and already countries whose commercial sectors are not well established on the net are missing out on business opportunities worldwide," said Khaled Bichara, co-owner and manager of Video On Line, a private Internet Service Provider (ISP) that will soon offer Internet access to the commercial sector and individuals who are not on-line via work or university.

When Internet access was first launched in Egypt, through the Cabinet's Information Decision and Support Centre (IDSC), it was offered free of charge to members of the commercial sector. "The government was offering support for the introduction of the Internet. Now the business community can develop and build upon what we have started," said Mohammed Kaddah, managing director of the Business and Technology Development Centre, which is affiliated to IDSC.

The Internet is so far a cost effective means of directly targeting consumers and providing instantaneous presence with global coverage — a big leap ahead of conventional advertising. On the Internet, people can present their companies, display their products or services, provide access to details, accept order enquiries, make transactions and process orders — at the touch of a button.

There are currently over 40 million Internet users in over 239 countries worldwide and the number is growing rapidly. The West has been developing and using the Internet for several years, but the Middle East only recently began. The total number of users in Bahrain, the UAE, Kuwait, Jordan, the West Bank, Lebanon and Egypt is under 30,000. Qatar, Pakistan, Yemen, and Oman are still in the process of getting connected.

Providing information on-line and conducting business via computers are not widely accepted concepts in the region yet. In Egypt, awareness, understanding and acceptance of Internet culture are not all that is needed. To make use of the Internet, businesses and individuals will need a computer, a telephone line, a service provider and a good command of English. For some companies and individuals, these requirements will be easily fulfilled, for many others they won't.

Only around 2 per cent of Egyptians have computers at home and there are fewer than four million telephone lines in Egypt. Not to mention that widespread poverty and illiteracy still persists. Kaddah maintains that the Internet is, in fact, an indirect road to development. "The Internet is a development exercise, and it is development for the elite," he stressed. "The Internet will create not exclusively for the elite, but for others, and for others, jobs for both hardware and software providers, and for others, there will be a noticeable domino effect on the rest of the economy," agreed Mohamed Osman, general manager, Mistr In-

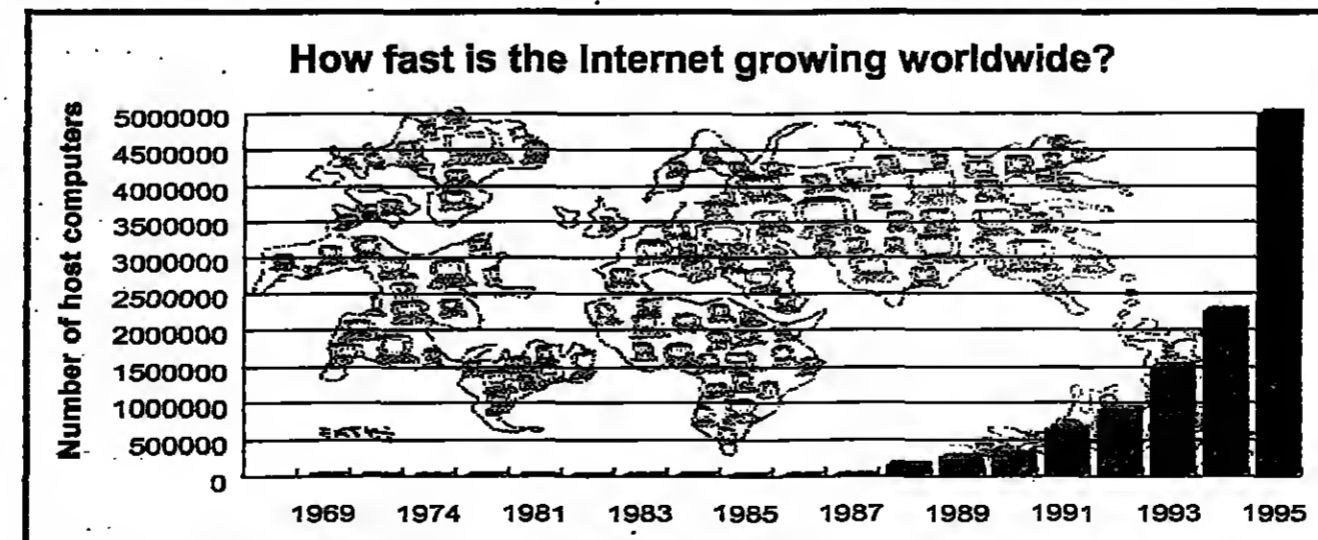
formation Services and Trading (MIST), another new ISP. Egypt is currently the fastest growing country in the region in terms of Internet subscribers and it is hoped the privatisation drive, launched last month, will give further impetus to this growth, improve the quality of services and help develop the country's communications infrastructure.

Currently the country's telecommunications authority, ARENTO, is concerned primarily with providing telephone lines. "De-

veloping digital communications is definitely one way to speed up Egypt's development process, but this addresses such a tiny segment of society at the moment," noted Cheryl Wafie, editor-in-chief of *Computerworld Middle East*, a Cairo-based publication.

One of the ISPs' main roles will be increasing the number of Internet users, thereby justifying more and more investment in the telecommunications infrastructure. "There is a very good market for the Internet in Egypt but we need to develop a critical mass, of 100,000 users, before the Internet can really take off," said Naguib Ghesry, president of StarNet, an ISP. "Judging by the response so far this is very possible," he said. "It is essential that the private sector expands the market base for the service to develop, grow and offer true support to the rest of the economy," said Bichara of Video On Line.

Already competition between the 11 newly established ISPs is



proving fruitful for subscribers. Companies are competing with each other by offering bonuses for subscribers such as free training sessions, free hours on-line and free licensed multi-lingual browsers. Also subscription rates will improve with time.

"As more customers are available, the service will become cheaper. The Internet is a service, not a durable commodity, so customers can switch to different companies monthly to get the best deal," said Mohamed El-Nawawy, development director of Intouch Communications Services, who have been offering e-mail and Internet access in Egypt for four years. "The price of the service is not the only factor subscribers will take into account; speed and reliability of access and speed of backup services in case of breakdowns are also very important."

"Internet use in Egypt is currently very frustrating. It is difficult to get through and downloading graphics takes forever," said Wafie. This is the case because the Internet backbone and telecommunications infrastructure are not adequate to facilitate fast and efficient services to the current number of subscribers, which has reached 15,000.

When IDSC first opened its operation to the commercial sector, there were only two lines for dial-up users. Now each company will be offering tens of lines to their dial-up subscribers in addition to leased lines and other means of accessing the net. "All of the problems experienced by IDSC during the trial period will serve as lessons for ISPs," said Ghesry.

Additional reporting by **Niveen Wahish**

## Don't take my Internet away

**Leila Gorchev** takes a look at how users are expected to behave in Egyptian cyberspace

It is not for futile reasons that most Internet denizens subscribe to the common advice: if you don't want the whole world to know about it, don't put it on the Internet. But there is an equally daunting prophecy: if you don't want to get in trouble, don't post or access anything that could be perceived as troubling.

Ahmed Fahim, a 23-year-old computer engineering student at Ain Shams University, admits that he does not know much about the Internet and that he has never logged on. Yet, he confidently states, however, that users cannot access pornographic images on the World Wide Web — a system for organising in-

formation on the Internet — because Egypt restricts certain files through Internet service provider (ISP) system administrators. If you try, he says, "You get an error message". Fahim is among many who speak from second-hand experience in a country of nearly 60 million where only a minuscule portion of the population uses the Internet. But universal discussions about cyber-rights and the myriad ills, or liberties, of the Internet, do affect him, as they do other initiates who might soon join the estimated 15,000 Egyptian users who access the Internet from private homes, businesses, government institutions or universities.

Though the Internet remains an unregulated provider of information, users and providers are employed by the Cabinet's Information and Decision Support Centre (IDSC) to "Please do not engage in any indecent activities which do not comply with the acceptable norms and cultural traditions in the country." Providers must comply with this loosely-worded advice, if it is possible.

Some do it to protect the citizenry. "We don't want the negative aspects of the Internet to harm our society in any way," says loTouche Communications Services business development director, Mohamed El-Nawawy. And others do it to protect the Internet. With foresight, Hatem El-Zorkani, chief executive of the Regional Information Technology Enterprise (RITE), says that "ISPs have the moral obligation to make this incubated baby survive and become a healthy child. They make sure they tell users what is there other than the bad stuff." Providers, however, are not responsible for any content published by an Internet user, he says. Nor are they responsible for any user practices, user "misuse" or user copyright law violations.

Since there is no direct supervision of Internet activities, providers, in turn, rely on their users to subscribe to a code of ethics and be their own guardians. So far, most of Egypt's users are involved in education, information technology companies or government, and are thus judged to be "more or less technical" and thus "safe," according to Ali Moselhy of the Regional Information Technology and Software Engineering Centre (RITSEC).

An adherent to the acceptable norms protocol, Nagui Anis, vice-president of one of Egypt's newest service providers, StarNet, says the IDSC guidelines are "enforceable to some extent." Though StarNet cannot censor the World Wide Web, he says, and currently, "nothing is blocked", news-groups are being filtered.

Two factors make StarNet decide what newsgroups are indecent: "cultural guidelines and hard disk space," says Anis. When StarNet makes its debut as a commercial service provider, they will offer "everything except news dealing with sex, violence, and extreme political views. This [StarNet] is not the place for such a thing." But he admits that there's "borderline stuff", illustrating the point with the following: a topless woman would be considered indecent. A woman in a bikini? "A bikini would offend some, some not." And civil rights in Tibet? "That's fine," he says. "It's in Tibet."

But nothing is really foolproof. Four years ago Saudi Arabia was hooked up to the Internet, for only "days," says RITE's El-Zorkani. At this time, Saudi Arabia uses only BITNET, "a store-and-forward version of the Internet," says Steve Ross, professor at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism. "Thus, if [the government] can theoretically check incoming messages."

"The Saudis discovered that students were sending dirty pictures back from the US, so they monitored. The students encrypted the pictures. So the Saudis held up all large binary files. So the students divided the pictures into smaller sections and sent them as e-mail. Last I heard here on campus, the Saudi government has given up, for now," writes Steve Ross via e-mail.

And even the United States, the bastion of free expression, is not immune to bureaucratic Internet monitoring. This past February saw President Bill Clinton and both houses of Congress passing a law that civil libertarians claim has made it illegal to discuss abortion on the Internet, even in e-mail messages. The new law makes this crime punishable by jail time or heavy fines.

Egypt says it does not monitor. Ali Moselhy at RITSEC claims that no correspondence or files are being "printed, reported, managed or filed." A censor is not technically difficult at the ISP or ARENTO [Egypt's telecommunications company] level. If there is a public telephone network and somebody does not want anybody to swear on the phones, says El-Zorkani, "ARENTO would have to hire 25 million people. This is virtually impossible." RITE's director of technical services, Shehab El-Nawawy, chirps in, "and unethical." And it slows things down, "You may catch someone sending a porno picture to Riyadh," says Steve Ross. "But you also delay market news that your banks need."

The Internet is demand-led and hence must reflect Egyptian culture, some believe. They are excited by a new existence of Egypt information producers on the Internet.

Others say that the Internet knows no national boundaries and is a great equaliser. In El-Zorkani's opinion, "a whole nation lost access to knowledge, information, awareness," when the Saudi government withdrew Internet services. But could misuse in Egypt cause a clampdown by the state? Could the state turn off the switch? "Turning the switch off or on is not going to happen in Egypt," says El-Zorkani. Whatever the misuse, "it's trivial," he continues. "Terrorists get funds through banks and communicate by telephone. Do you close the banks? No. Do you turn off the phones? No."



Travellers with a taste for luxury

Photos: Mohamed El-Dekhalani

## The Russians are coming

The volume of Russian tourists to Egypt is growing. Not only do they stroll the sites, they go on feverish shopping sprees. Rehab Saad gets the picture and talks to travel agencies about the growing potential

Over the years, many Russian travellers to Egypt arrived equipped with electrical appliances, Russian cameras and alcohol that they'd sell for cheap from their hotel rooms or on the streets. But since the early 1990s and the political and economic consequences of the break-up of the Soviet Union, more Russians are boarding their flights to Cairo with convertible currency rather than goods: they come to tour and to buy.

"Russians are now able to travel the world," says Nagwa El-Alfy, a tour operator at Tomy Tours, who organises trips for "wealthy tourists" from Moscow and Leningrad.

About 20 million Russians travel to different world destinations annually. Last year, 113,000 Russian tourists came to Egypt — a 66 per cent increase over the previous year. Not only do they explore Cairo's *souks* (markets) and stores, but they head to Cairo's satellite industrial cities like 10th of Ramadan, for wholesale goods, returning to the airport with "truckloads of goods," says Ahmed Shehata, general manager of Al-Madina Travel Agency. Since President Hosni Mubarak cancelled the taxes imposed on exported goods to Russia, Russians can exit with all the goods they want, duty free.

Presented with this new kind of Russian tourist, travel agents label them the "very best": "They have money and buy huge quantities of Egyptian products," says Mohamed Reda, general manager of Lucky Tours. He has seen them fly from Hurgada to Luxor by private helicopter, at a cost of about \$4,000 and has watched them enjoy their share of nightclubs and casinos: "a clear

indication that they have money to spare," he says.

The Russians are coming with the help of their own travel agents. No longer limited to two government-controlled travel agencies — InTourist and Sputnik — Egyptian travel agents now deal with a host of private companies. Reda estimates that there are between 2,000 and 3,000 agencies based in Moscow.

Since the Russian market is getting larger and more profitable, many Egyptian travel agencies are eagerly targeting Russian tourists. Only three agencies used to deal with the Russian market and now there are 250, says Reda. "The competition is tough, especially in regard to prices." This new competition also piques some agents like Shehata. He says the newer travel agencies destabilise the market by offering "very cheap prices or very high prices." The Egyptian Ministry of Tourism opened a tourist office in Russia.

Egyptian agencies not only want to capitalise on the opening-up of Russia; they want to be able to better accommodate these tourists with more hotels and tourist villages to avoid overbooking, especially in Hurgada — reputedly one of the Russians' favourite spots. "The Russian market could be the pillar of tourism in Egypt," says Shehata, who imagines Egypt could attract between five to six million tourists annually.

Travel agents also want more Russian-speaking tour guides in Luxor and Aswan. Only eight guides spoke Russian before *perestroika* and now there are around

100, estimates Shehata. He explains that it's still not enough. "Agencies are forced to bring guides from Cairo in times of need," he says. "This naturally increases expenses." Generally, the guides are graduates of university-level Russian language programmes or Russian Cultural Centre students.

Some agents are advocating greater promotion efforts: participating in Russia-based tourism forums, like this week's Moscow's international exhibition (that the Egyptian Tourist Authority attended for the third time this year); holding special tourist exhibitions for Russians in Egypt; increasing the number of flights between Egypt and Russia and establishing relations with the Russian press.

"We should invite more Russian journalists to write about Egypt," says Reda who recently held a press conference in Siberia and returned with 30 journalists in a fully-booked plane. "I am expecting another 12 planes from Siberia," he added.

The Ministry of Tourism is not far behind the travel agencies: it is launching a \$1.5 million advertising campaign in Russia, covering newspapers, magazines and Russian TV. And some predict that the Russians won't be able to resist. It is also trying to tap into



Russian investment-seekers. "In Russia, the taxes on any project are extremely high. That is why most Russians invest in foreign countries," says Hamdi Abdel-Hamid of the Ministry of Tourism. "Russians already have good opportunities in Israel. We should do everything we can to get them to our country."

### A pot of gold

THE JOINT Egyptian-American mission excavating in the area of the Wadi Natrun monasteries has unearthed the remains of a church built in the name of Yuhanna El-Qasir, or "John the Short". Its ruined walls stand two metres high.

Excavators said that the outline or details of the face of Christ could be discerned beneath layers of dust. The altar, frescoes and a rare collection of decorated pottery were also uncovered.

But even more exciting — at least to treasure-hunters — was the discovery of a small pot containing eight gold dinars that date to the 11th century: six belong to the era of the Fatimid Caliph Al-Mustanser and two hail from the era of Al-Hakem B'amar Allah. Engraved with Qur'anic inscriptions, the coins were found in excellent condition and required no cleaning. They will be displayed in the Islamic Museum's rare collections hall.

Since 1995, the mission has been carrying out excavations under the auspices of the Supreme Council of Antiquities, the Coptic Antiquities Centre and the Calvin Institute for Theological Studies, and will restore and conserve all pieces found. Excavation in the area is expected to reveal more on the origins of the Coptic priesthood.

### Aquatic palace

THE SUPREME Council of Antiquities will convert the Palace of Youssef Basha Kamel in the Stanley district of Alexandria into a museum of marine life.

Visitors will be able to explore Egypt's aquatic history during the Pharaonic, Graeco-Roman, Coptic and Islamic periods. Construction on the seven feddan area has started.

### Mexican outreach

IN AN attempt to promote tourism from Mexico, the Egyptian Embassy there organised a week devoted to Egypt. They offered local delicacies, presented folkloric shows and exhibited Pharaonic statues, tapestries and brasswork.

### Your Hot Line Numbers for reservation at CAIRO SHERATON HOTEL

*Business Club*

Hot Line : 337 4606  
Fax : 336 4487

  
Cairo Sheraton  
HOTEL, TOWERS & CASINO  


## Restoration of Cairo gate

After a long period of neglect, the Bab Zuwayla area is getting a helping hand. Reem Leila reports

The two major earthquakes that hit Egypt in 1992 and 1995 badly affected the archaeologically-rich area of Bab Zuwayla. After Supreme Council of Antiquities (SCA) experts scouted the area for damage, they called upon world archaeological institutions to help in the restoration process.

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the American Research Center in Egypt (ARCE) responded to the SCA's plea. USAID offered a grant of \$15 million to complete the restoration work and won the SCA-organised tender. "The Supreme Council of Antiquities cannot afford to restore all Egyptian monuments. Our budget is very limited and the international donations are not enough," said the council's head, Abdel-Halim Nouruddin.

Due to earthquake tremors and sewage water that is seeping into monument foundations in the entire Bab Zuwayla area, the *bab* (gate) itself, the *zawiya-sabil* of Farag Ibn Barquq, the Mosque of Saleh Tala'i and the *sabil-kutab* of Nafisa El-Bayda, are all in a precarious state. (*Zawiya* is a small mosque without a minaret, *sabil* is a public water dispenser and *kutab* is a single-class elementary school to teach the Qur'an.)

Built in 1092, the Bab Zuwayla gate — named after Berber tribe army units who were quartered nearby — marks the southern limit of the walled city of Al-Qahira, built by the Shi'a Fatimids who conquered Egypt in 969 AD. It is one of the rare examples of pre-Crusader Muslim architecture and its innovative stone masonry is acknowledged throughout the Islamic world. But its stones are now deteriorating and the foundations have collapsed.

The *zawiya-sabil* of Farag Ibn Barquq, a small Sufi establishment constructed in 1408 by the ruler of the Circassian Mamelukes, suffers from a vertical split in its western wall. There are also a few cracks in the ceiling of the mosque and in a corner of the annexed fountain room, known for its beautiful stucco ceiling. Although small, the *zawiya-sabil* contains the architectural features of a large mosque and is known for its lovely inlaid polychrome stone. The monument is scheduled for restoration in May or June and will take nearly 14 months to be completed.

A number of factors led to the deterioration of the Mosque of Saleh Tala'i, the last major Fatimid mosque built in Cairo in 1160 and the only one established outside the walls of the city: a new 250 metre-long sewage pipe was laid after the 1992 earthquake to replace the one constructed early this century, but it is rotting; and the earthquake cracked the roof of the mosque and dislodged stones in the pulpit — the fourth oldest in Cairo. In the 12th century, there were ground-level shops whose rent once helped to keep the mosque. The shops are now buried three metres down in a moat.

In 1303, the Mosque of Saleh Tala'i was hit by an earthquake and the minaret over the main entrance fell. Though the minaret was re-built at the beginning of the 20th century, the last two earthquakes weakened the three concrete columns on the *jowaz*, or the upper part of the minaret. The mosque is now closed to visitors and prayers are no longer held. Those who want to visit must request an SCA permit.

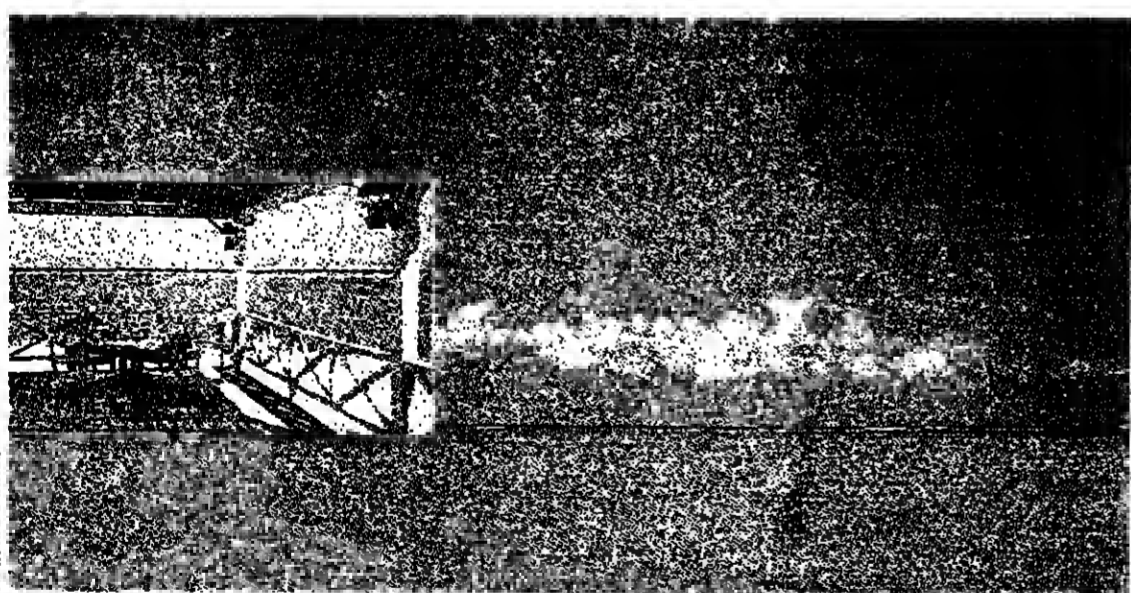
Built in 1796, the *sabil-kutab* of Nafisa Al-Bayda, or "fountain school", must be totally restored due to abuse, such as water left running in the *sabil*. Ancient stones are missing from the fountain and the earthquakes cracked the walls.

While *sabils* are common in the Islamic world, it is only in Cairo that one finds them combined with *kutabs*. The construction of *sabil-kutabs* dates to the 13th century. From the late Mameluke times they were built as independent foundations (with their own endowments) on small but prominent sites throughout the city. Built in 1796, this *sabil* is representative of the Ottoman bow-fronted *sabil-kutabs* of the 18th century. Its builder, Nafisa Al-Bayda, was the wife of Murad Bey, a Mameluke actively involved in the war against the French invaders, led by Napoleon Bonaparte. She acted as an intermediary between Napoleon and Murad Bey.




In November 1994, Egyptian conservators completed their architectural documentation of the area. Photos, historical documents of the monuments and a workshop were prepared by ARCE. The centre favours restoration of Bab Zuwayla because it is a large archaeological area where monuments stand close together, said Robert K. Vincent, the ARCE project director. Given the favourable layout, the team will build a protective wall around the archaeological zone. Residents of Bab Zuwayla have been helpful, said Vincent, as they've already moved their shops a few metres away from the planned wall area.


To ensure long-lasting restoration of the monuments, said Fahmi Abdel-Alim, head of the Islamic and Coptic department of the SCA, coordination among various governing authorities is required. "Before restoring the *zawiya-sabil* of Farag Ibn Barquq, for example, the Sewage Sanitary Authority should completely revamp the sewage system," he said. "Restoring the monument protects it only 50 per cent. The other 50 per cent depends on restoring the surrounding area and changing people's behaviour."

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## Dorreya Sharafeddin: The mores' last sigh

She was the censor. She is no longer. She stepped down, in style, and on principle

She is soft-spoken and gentle; it is difficult to visualise Dorreya Sharafeddin, mercilessly wielding the censor's scissors and determinedly keeping watch on public morals. That, however, was her job until very recently. She stepped down from the post for reasons of principle, making her one of very few public servants in recent history to have done so.

Dorreya Sharafeddin was born in Mansoura, the youngest of five. "Being the youngest child, I was, as in most Egyptian families, spoiled and coddled by my father." Lest she be misunderstood — the censor is ever vigilant — she adds: "This he did by giving me extra attention in guiding my readings in his extensive library." The mention of her mother evokes an unexpected reaction from Sharafeddin: she pauses for a moment, then begins to weep. In complete silence, tears flow down her face. The subject is dropped. Some time later, deep in another discussion, she opens it again, just as suddenly. "My mother died some 16 years ago, but it is uncanny how she is constantly in my thoughts almost every waking moment of my life. To lose a mother is perhaps the most traumatic experience one can go through. You suddenly lose the person you can fully rely upon, the person who will worry for you, rejoice for you, solve your problems, carry your burdens; suddenly she is not there, and never will be there again."

Her father was director of education in Daqahliya, with a passion for poetry and politics. Educated in nuns' schools, Dorreya fondly remembers the firmness of the Franciscan sisters, as well as their tenderness to their pupils. "I was usually at the root of any class mischief, but I guess my innocent looks always drew suspicion away from me!"

Graduated top of her class, Dorreya had the choice of any college. She chose the Cairo University's Faculty of Eco-

nomics and Political Science — a prestigious school, whose students usually aspired to a career in the Foreign Ministry.

"My interest in politics was a result of my father's passion for the subject, and not being an ardent supporter of Nasserism, he had a lot to say about the regime — mostly critical." The lively discussions, which invariably included his daughter, bred in Sharafeddin an interest in politics that grew into a passion with the years.

"Political analysis has always been a subject very close to my heart. I never had any difficulty absorbing political texts, no matter how complex or obscure."

Why, then, did she not choose a career in the diplomatic service? "I am never happy away from Egypt. Although I love travel, after a few weeks on the road, I yearn for home, so a career in the diplomatic service would have caused me almost pathological homesickness."

Dorreya chose a career in the media by coincidence. Friends had told her of an upcoming exam to recruit radio announcers. She applied, and a day before her exam she visited Farouk Shousha, a family friend and a senior announcer at the time (today he heads the radio service), to ask for his views on her potential as an announcer. He asked her to read, then sadly told her that she had a great voice and good diction, but that her grammar was atrocious!

"I was shocked. I was always top of my class in language, so what could have possibly happened?" She realised that "the years in college and reading mostly foreign language material left my Arabic rather rusty." But what was she to do, with the exam the following day?

"Well, I was not about to give in. A friend who was a teacher at the Faculty of Arts, preparing his doctoral dissertation, was immediately drafted! We spent six or seven hours improving my grammar." The following day, after her exam, Farouk

Shousha called her to make sure she was in fact the one who had taken the exam.

It was all uphill from there. Her career in radio was meteoric. "I really owe this to my senior colleagues, who never hesitated in helping and encouraging us. Today everyone guards his or her turf with his or her life." A senior colleague, Ahmed Radwan, gave her an early start as a news reader, by smuggling a test tape in to an examining committee.

One of the most influential people in her life was the highly respected and widely read political commentator, Ahmed Bahadddin. Bahadddin had a weekly programme called "Israeli Matters". Dorreya as a novice, simply had to ask him the questions he prepared for her.

Eventually Bahadddin noticed her potential and political acumen, and asked her to prepare the questions herself. He also gave her a massive reading list, "as comprehensive as a college degree course".

Although she worked for Middle East Radio, a light-hearted entertainment channel, her programmes were always as serious as possible: quiz programmes or the political programme with Bahadddin.

Sharafeddin then went on TV in 1974 as a news reader and cultural programmes presenter. She is still there: every Saturday evening, on "Cine Club". She has been presenting this programme "for a long time" — no need to quantify.

Sharafeddin is good at different perspectives. The audience is always surprised at her take on films; and she always has something new to say — even about Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis. A new angle always emerges from her quiet, calm

and confident conversation with her guest on the show.

But where does cinema fit into the scheme of things? Dorreya the political scientist, now a film pundit? Art in all its forms has always interested her. "Although I never mastered a particular art, I have always been fascinated by the history and development of the various art forms, especially the plastic arts."

It was the late broadcaster and poet Abdel-Rahman Ali who encouraged Dorreya to take a diploma course in art criticism, an experience which was to set her on her course. She chose cinema because it combined many disciplines.

The move from cinema critic to censor must have been all the more painful; having enjoyed film so much, how does one decide to deprive others of enjoyment on moral grounds? Offered the post in 1988, Sharafeddin was unable to take up the offer due to her studies. In 1994, however, when it was

repeated, she accepted, and began work in early 1995.

Her appointment was met with mixed reactions. The majority of writers, dramatists, and cinematographers welcomed the appointment of a "media person", whom they expected to be sensitive to the problems that face the cinema and theatre. But some critics and censor department personnel, had reservations.

"There was an early attempt to intimidate me. Articles would be slanted in such a way as to convey veiled threats: it was implied that the post was above my head, and in order not to drown, I should hang on to the bulwarks of the old establishment."

She was also reminded, albeit gently, that certain "sacred cows" in show business were somehow beyond the reach of her scissors.

But Sharafeddin staunchly refused to toe the line supposedly drawn for her. She would not budge. Even satellite dishes do

not perturb her, although she is not exactly pleased with the antennae sprouting from the rooftops, seeming to mock the censor's efforts. "Your house has a front door, and even though you realise that the street is full of unwanted elements, you make sure that you close your door to these. You don't leave it wide open, because the street is littered with what is, to you, unacceptable."

Two criteria guided her decisions as censor: offense to public morals and anything against religion. "Nothing else affects a decision to allow or ban a film or play. We cannot hide facts or ideas when the skies are wide open."

As a censor, "I was overwhelmed by the amount of administrative work I had to do", she says. "I had the idyllic belief that I would be able to devote most of my time to viewing, reviewing, studying, evaluating and finally deciding."

Soon, however, she realised that this was not to be. Her job entailed a vast amount of routine work. "This, I abhor," she says, with an almost imperceptible shudder. "In fact, routine is another reason why I did not choose the foreign office. Regular hours and routine are anathema to me."

Another factor, elaborated on at first off the record almost on the eve of her resignation, was constant interference from the Supreme Council of Culture. "The censor's office must be directly under the office of the minister; certainly not a committee. This is the case with all supervisory bodies in other ministries, so why not in the Ministry of Culture?"

It is mainly, for this reason, and because she did not feel the minister of culture gave her adequate support, that Dorreya Sharafeddin, tendered her resignation. She felt she could not continue under the administrative constraints imposed.

On the other hand, Gaber Asfour, secretary-general of the Supreme Council of Culture, made statements to the effect that in his capacity as Sharafeddin's direct boss, he had never refused any of her administrative or financial requests. Nor, he added, had he interfered with matters of censorship policy; the censor, he emphasised, answered directly to the minister of culture.

Sharafeddin can now air grievances she once muffled, and she certainly holds strong views on the quality of cinema available. The unfortunate departures from good taste which she perceives as characteristic of recent cinematic and theatrical productions furnished her with ample material upon which to exercise her talents.

"During the '50s and '60s, the cinema dealt with the ancient regime, the landowners and so-called capitalist exploiters of the poorer classes, and of course the corruption of [ex-King] Farouk and his entourage. This was not the reflection of an ideology; rather, it was a safe course that would certainly receive the blessings of the ruling elite. Again in the '70s, cinema attacked the so-called centres of power, by portraying them as corrupt, power-hungry demons. Here, again, was a real attempt to tackle contemporary issues, but then it was safer to criticise the past."

The '80s inevitably brought attacks on *ibfiah*. "With the increase in freedom, we immediately notice the changes issues are being tackled head on, the government is being overtly

lampooned and criticised — so holds are barred."

But as the last decade drew to a close, the phenomenon to which she alludes as "commercial cinema" reared its ugly head, bringing about a rapid decline in taste and talent, and eventually leading to what Sharafeddin sees as the crisis of the movie industry in Egypt.

"First, we had a dramatic drop in the number of movie houses. This led producers to rely on foreign distributors, which in turn lowered standards. And, last but not least, with the migration to petro-dollar countries, the structure of the middle class — the traditional taste-makers — altered radically. A totally different class, with little education... now decides what we see and hear."

She sees film as a national heritage that must find an audience on its home ground, not rely on foreign markets. Reliance on these markets was what produced a wave of films depicting Egyptian society as a web of criminals invariably involved in drug dealing, prostitution, crime and innumerable forms of corruption in high places. This is what set the stereotype.

As a means of redressing this situation, Dorreya feels that "the role of the entrepreneur should become more prominent. Local capital must invest in production, as well as in building cinemas. And this is where the government can assist — not by interfering or producing, but by encouraging and giving incentives."

Dorreya is married with two daughters. "I must confess," she offers with a smile, "my husband is the real unknown soldier in my life. His support and encouragement are the greatest comfort anyone can ask for. He is definitely not the traditional Oriental male." And her daughters? "I try to make up for my absences from home by intensifying the quality of our relationship."

And ultimately, she is not pessimistic. "Cinema is here to stay. We hope that it will resurface. After all, we see a definite renaissance in the state theatre, mainly as a result of changes in key personnel. Our human resources. We have an abundance of competent, talented and qualified people. Let's use them."

Dorreya Sharafeddin is no longer the censor. Her decision was received with raised eyebrows in certain quarters, and admiration in others. Aptly enough, the decision was "a matter of principle".

Profile by Mohamed Islam

Pack of Cards by Madame Sosostis

It's sad but true. Much as I would have loved to fill you in on the past week — the good times, the bad times, the wish I always had times... but it cannot be. Pray for more space next week, dears, pray. See you then.

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